Midnite's Journey

One Man's Improbable Voyage Through America's Reality

by Dana Silkiss

Midnite's Journey

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When slavery was legally abolished, a new set of laws called the Black Codes emerged to criminalize legal activity for African Americans. Through the enforcement of these laws, acts such as standing in one area of town or walking at night, for example, became the criminal acts of "loitering" or "breaking curfew," for which African Americans were imprisoned. A system of convict leasing was developed to allow white "owners" in the South to literally purchase prisoners to live on their property and work under their control. Through this system, bidders paid an average $25,000 a year to the state, in exchange for control over the lives of all of the prisoners. The system provided revenue for the state and profits for the owners.

Just a few decades later, we are witnessing the return of all of these systems of prison labor exploitation. Private corporations are able to lease factories in prisons, as well as lease prisoners out to their factories. Private corporations are running prisons-for-profit. Government-run prison factories operate as multibillion dollar industries in every state, and throughout the federal prison system. In the most punitive and racist prison systems, we are even witnessing the return of the chain gang.

Amendment XIII. Section 1:

Neither slavery nor involuntary servitude, except as a punishment for crime whereof the party shall have been duly convicted, shall exist within the United States or any place subject to their jurisdiction.

-December 6, 1865

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Prologue

(Midnite's Epiphany)

Actually, I was eight years old when I first realized something was wrong. I mean, I had my share of fights in the neighborhood, due to my being half-Jewish. (What the other half was didn't seem to matter, I suppose, as long as it wasn't Quaker or some other "different" religion.)

Anyway, what made the impression on me started in a local Catholic church. I had gone to Sunday mass with my best friend and had particularly enjoyed a sermon, spoken quite eloquently, by the monsignor, relating the message of how one should "love thy neighbor" & "do unto others" etc. . . .

That night I was playin' at my friend David's house and, lo & behold, there was the monsignor talkin' to David's parents. The three of them had obviously had a few too many. As I had always been too curious for my own good, I snuck into the room and hid behind the sofa, figuring they were so drunk they would never notice me. I got myself situated just in time to hear the (very proper) monsignor saying "The gall of some

people! I was in ***my*** pulpit, giving my morning sermon, when two niggers tried to get into ***my*** church. Of course, they were politely ushered out, as quickly as possible, and that was that! Why do they have to make trouble and come to ***my*** church? I mean why can't they stay with their own kind?" he very indignantly (and drunkenly) proclaimed.

I felt as tho' I had been hit over the head with a baseball bat. Yeah, the bat from heaven. Here was somebody highly revered in our community. This religious, prestigious and influential man, who, as I reluctantly, admitted to myself, had had a profound influence on my life, now became a devil to me. I had heard beautiful ideas and lessons coming out of his mouth in the church but the exact opposite spewed forth now. In my naiveté, I was dumbstruck. How could people have such a dichotomy of actions and thoughts, not to mention false preachings? Why say what you don't believe? Merely to mouth something you didn't believe in, or was it to uphold other people's beliefs and views in you and/or your religion?

As the days passed, I pondered the events I had witnessed. Why? Are people *really* different? I was in turmoil. Were all those things everybody said about "other people" really true? (It seemed like everybody was "them.") And then it hit me! People I hung out with, or knew, said things about my father, for being Jewish, which I definitely knew had no bearing in reality. At that point in time I realized I had just found one of my callings: to investigate the great paradox of mankind and life itself.

Chapter I

(Avenging Angel)

Florida was hot! So was the lady I wasn't with. It had been a good week, up to that point. I had flown down to Miami to check out some friends & play some music. Political, musical and free lovin' All the ingredients of a superb formula. What I hadn't expected in Miami was the reactionary atmosphere blowin' around. I had figured it would be filled with old, retired liberal New Yorkers. Wrong again! There didn't seem to be anybody in view who wasn't spewing the ignorant rhetoric of the times (no, not the *N.Y. Times*) Hippie! Nigger! Pinko-queer! Subversive Russian! Dirty Commie! The commentaries of our modern age. The ruling class. Uh, probably the elite of our country.

Anyway, I finished my musical obligation in a hurry, left Miami and worked my way up to Daytona Beach, figuring I'd catch some rays and just relax for a while. I got into town April 14, 1976. around 7:30 a.m., a Wednesday morning. I hitched across one of the bridges to the beachfront areas, walked down the strip and looked for a decent place to grab something to eat. Well,

I was so hungry; I ended up at the first place I went to. Good ol' Hojo's. Land of the orange roof. As soon as I got inside, I headed straight for the bathroom, pissed for what seemed like twenty minutes, washed up and tried to make myself presentable. Feelin' refreshed, I walked out to a table, sat down & waited for a waitress to take my order. Meanwhile I was daydreaming, trying to figure out what the hell my next move was going to be, when through a (very thick) haze, I heard someone saying

"Excuse me sir! May I take your order, or do you need a menu?"

Comin' out of my daze, probably due to no sleep for the last 36 hours, I slowly looked up at the speaker and was momentarily stunned. This lady was a waitress? She was true perfection, classic art come to life. In other words, my type of beauty.

"Uh, give me two eggs over easy, toast, coffee and tomato juice"

I not too intelligently said for lack of any better verbiage.

"God damn, she's fine! I've got to think of something fast. -Southern rap #forty-two, yeah right!" I thought.

"Excuse me, miss," I half-assed spit out, "I'm new around here. Are there any

good music clubs, or any like spots to hang out? I've only been here for a couple of hours and need to find some music contacts, so I can make some money," I grinned.

She laughed, "I'm not gonna be much help to you, my man, I'm from Jersey."

Trying to quickly regroup my shit, I said, in the vernacular of the times, "Why don't we hang together and find something to do?"

The rest of my meal was great, as we got to know each other, with a little small talk, and then she agreed; we set a time & place and I left.

"Good lord, hot steamin'! I'm a lucky man," I thought. *"Lucky! Lucky! Lucky! Daytona's gonna be alright! Enough free-wheelin', time for me to get clean. Um, let's see, I have about six hours before ... before I'm to meet…., shit! I forget to get her name. Oh well, if &/or when I see her again, I'll find out soon enough."*

As I walked along the beautiful beachfront area of Daytona, I checked out the local populace. People were loose and carefree, there was an almost California - type atmosphere. That I liked. What I didn't like were all the police cars everywhere. Not

cruising, just sitting...waiting... “Waiting for what,” I wondered. Ever get that feeling, that small knot in the pit of your stomach? That first twinge of paranoia. *“Oh! Come on,”* I chided myself. *“The most illegal thing I’d done lately was hitchhike. Cool-out,”* I told myself.

With a sudden change of mood, I walked briskly towards my unknown destination. I wanted a place to rest, but not some Ramada Inn or Hilton. Something just a little quainter. I wanted to be among the people. I stayed away from the tourist areas. I wasn’t in the mood for that scene. Day dreamin’, walkin', searchin', hmm, always searchin'!

“Guess I’ll hang here for a week, or so, I did leave Miami in kind of a hurry. Gotta get back to school soon. Well, fairly soon, anyway. But then again, I’ll see what happens with this fine young lady. As usual, play it by ear. There! That looks perfect!”

A summer cottage with a sign; For rent-daily-weekly-monthly (with a phone number). I slowly walked around the cottage, really inspecting it. Nice yard, pretty shutters. I peered through the windows. Wow! Absolutely gorgeous. I went directly to the nearest phone booth and called the number. The landlady gave me

her address and told me to stop by right away. Twenty-two minutes later, I had made all the arrangements and paid for a week in advance, quickly walked back to "my" cottage and opened the front door. Whew. No hassles. Solitude at last. I inspected the entire house and was relieved to see the rest of it was as quaint and immaculate as the part of the house I had seen from the outside. The freakin' house had everything you could possibly expect. Out of habit I opened the fridge door and was surprised to see one beer.

"What the hell," I thought, as I opened the can and silently toasted the landlady for being so thoughtful. By now it was all of 10:00 a.m. I'd been in town for 2 1/2 hours, had a nice little place to stay and had met a beautiful lady.

"Damn!" I was thinking, *"I'd definitely been down worse roads before."*

Wanting to keep my "roads" open, I deduced that I'd better take a nice hot-steamin' shower, as I always found I ran across fewer detours when I was clean and smellin' good. Twenty minutes later I felt like a new man. Calculating that I had about four hours before I had to meet Miss X, I decided to leave my humble abode and further check out my surroundings. Walking

directly to the beach, I was pleasantly surprised to see cars, dune buggies and motorcycles actually riding on the sand! They weren't even sinking! Strange, but true.

I walked for about two hours. Fresh air, sun, sea, dunes and scrub grass. Man, this was a different world. Clear, pollution-free skies & everything. Shit! New York (my home town) was still 30 degrees, not to mention in Colorado, where I had come from, before my journey to Miami. Here it musta been close to 90 degrees. *"Was I nuts to think about goin' back to the Apple, or Colorado?"* I wondered.

Suddenly my attention was ripped from my thoughts by an occurrence directly across the street. I saw three cops throw this black man onto his back, slam a billy club directly into his testicles and repeatedly smash his head into the sidewalk. Not being able to just stand by and be a witness, I ran to the other side of the street, and as innocently as I could, I asked, "Excuse me officer, but what exactly has this man done?"

"What has he done?" He mocked me, "Well, let me see, he was born a nigger."

He looked me in the eye and spat out, “And I had nothing else to do this fine morning. Why you asking?” he snarled at me. “You’re not one of them commie nigger-lovers, are you?”

“Well,” I said, “you got one outta two right. Listen, please give me your badge number, and when I speak to your captain, let’s see who loves who, o.k., Mr. Super cop?”

At this moment the other two cops stopped hitting the man, who I determined was about my age, and picked him up by his hair. Either they looked slightly worried, or angry, I couldn’t get a clear vibe on them right away.

The cop I had directed my questions at put his gun to my neck and “whispered” in my ear, “Listen to me, you’re lucky there’s a crowd, or I’d let you join your buddy over there! You have twenty-four hours to get the hell out of Daytona or no one will ever hear from you again.”

“Fuck you!” I screamed, as loud as I could, tearing myself away from him and towards the crowd that was gathering at a fast rate. “Where do you think this is, fucking Germany, this is supposed to be Amerika, you asshole, you fucking asshole!” I screamed repeatedly.

The three cops dropped the man and jumped into their prowl cars, put their sirens on and screeched out of there. I was shaking, angry and scared.

"Whew! Either I was nuts or just plain stupid," I couldn't decide which. But what the hell was I doing? Worrying about myself?" I leaned down and took a careful look at the man I had just saved. He was dressed in ivy league clothes, had expensive jewelry and two diamond earrings in his left ear. I slowly turned him over. Wow! The cops had really done a number on him. His shirt was ripped open and his chest was bleeding from the midpoint and along his entire left side to his waist. His scalp was bleeding, but I couldn't tell from where, cause his afro was about ten inches long. He was moaning and incoherent. I looked around and shouted at the onlookers to call an ambulance. One by one they drifted away, without saying anything. It was fuckin' incredible. What the hell was wrong with people? I wasn't asking them to get involved. Seeing that I would have to take things into my own hands, I said, "Listen buddy, I'm gonna help you, I'm picking you up and bringing you to that bench over there. Do you understand what I'm saying?"

He mumbled something and nodded his head in the affirmative. I slung his arm over my head and around my neck. I grabbed his waist with my other hand and, as gently as I could, hoisted him up. We limped over to the bench, where, luckily, there was also a pay phone. I put him back down and walked over to the phone booth, called a cab, (luckily, the Taxi company's number was on the wall of the booth!) told the dispatcher to hurry and making a quick decision, gave him my "home" address. I figured the black dude's injuries weren't life threatening and didn't want to go through all the inevitable red tape that the hospital would make him and me go through. I ran over to my new friend. He was looking around with eyes that appeared much clearer than before.

He looked at me and just studied my face.

"Why did you do it, why'd you help me?" He asked.

"Why?" I foolishly repeated. "Because I saw you gettin' hurt and unless you had robbed or murdered someone, I couldn't see anyone gettin' done to them what I saw back there. And seeing where we are, I highly doubted that."

“Man, I have never had a white dude help me, or many black people, for that matter,” he dubiously said. “What do you want, white boy?”

In spite of the circumstances, I started laughing and said, “Direct your paranoia to where it belongs. I just stuck my neck out for you, which should tell you something. And as far as what I want, I want to take you to my house and fix up your wounds, get you something to eat, and then you can do whatever you want. Well, here’s our cab, what do you want to do? I’ve got things to accomplish today.”

“Listen, I’m sorry,” he said, as he extended his hand.

I grasped his hand and said “Let’s forget all the bullshit; you’ve been through a lot. My name’s Midnite.”

Still grasping my hand, he stared at me and said “Wait a minute! Midnite, fucking Midnite the guitar genius? I don’t fuckin’ believe this. Holy shit! Man. Uh, my name’s Marc, Marc Johnson.”

“What the fuck you love birds doin’?” The cabby shouted.” Are youse guys comin’ or what?”

“Yeah, yeah,” I said, “we’re with yah.”

We were lost in our own thoughts on the ride back to my house. When we arrived, Marc said, “I’m paying the fare.” I thanked him; we got out and went into the house. “Nice place,” Marc said.

“I’m just passing through,” I replied, “here for a little R&R in between gigs.”

“Well, it sure looks like heaven to me right now,” Marc wearily replied.

As I watched him painfully go into the living room, I said “Marc, listen, man. I want you to feel at home here. There’s a phone in the kitchen, there’s a clean bathroom and I think you should take a hot shower, clean up those wounds, and, maybe you’ll start feeling a little better. While you’re doing all that, I’m gonna do some food shopping. Is there anything in particular you need, besides bandages and shit like that?”

Marc looked at me and said, “You know, I don’t understand you. I mean you don’t even fuckin’ know me and you practically save my life, bring me to your house, let me do whatever I want, go to get me supplies, and now you’re gonna leave me alone in your house. What the fuck!!?”

“Yah, man,” I said, “I’ll see you later, dude.”

"Wait a minute!" he yelled, here, take some money, don't fuckin argue, get us some steaks, champagne, cognac, lots of food, lots of ointments and bandages, and whatever else you want. Now here, just take this and I'll see you when you get back."

I went outside, smiling. "This dude seems to be alright. At least I didn't save some asshole from those country cops." As I was putting the money he gave me into my pocket, I saw a one-hundred-dollar bill on top of the pile. Incredibly, all the bills behind that one were also hundred dollar bills. *"What the fuck,"* I thought, *"either this dude was extremely grateful, or he was totally wacked. I'll deal with that later."* Before an hour and a half went by, I returned with all the "necessary" supplies, as well as anything else I thought would be fun to have. *"Damn"*, I thought, *"I gotta meet the waitress soon. Shit, how am I gonna do this?"* Entering the house, I saw Marc talking earnestly on the phone. He saw me and gestured that he'd be off in a minute. I nodded and proceeded to put the food in the fridge and pantry. Listening to Marc's conversation, while I was putting everything away, I heard some interesting information. Marc apparently was talking to a member of his family, relaying the events of the last

few hours. He was alternating between agitation and calmness, shouting and laughter. Finally; he hung up the phone and came over to me.

"Man, that was a trip, my whole family wants to come down here and press charges against the police force. I still don't know what they're gonna do, neither do they. I think they're gonna hold a family meeting to decide what to do," he said.

"Wow! They ain't playing around," I said," "What exactly is your family into?"

"Well, my father's a N.Y State Supreme court judge, two of my uncles are in the NYPD and I have an older brother that's a litigation lawyer. Oh, I'm in my third year of law school." Marc innocently said.

"Not exactly a bunch of bums," I laughed. "That's a whole lot of firepower. Maybe we will see some fireworks. I'd really like to see some asses roll around here. By the way, what were you doing earlier? Where are you staying and why did those assholes beat the shit out of you?" I asked.

Marc said, "I'm here on spring break. I had walked up to a woman to ask directions to a hotel, when she just started screaming. I tried to calm her down, but she just kept

screaming, help, help! A cop car was passing by, the cops jumped out, didn't ask me anything and just started hitting me. You saw the rest."

"Yes, I did," I said. "Welcome to the South, huh? Even though the North, West and East are the same, no?" Marc nodded in agreement.

Suddenly, I jumped up and said "Listen, Marc, I've got a date and have to meet this fine young lady in about twenty minutes. Make yourself at home, eat some of that food you paid for, and I'll see you sometime later, hopefully much later." I mischievously said. We shook hands and I proceeded to my destination. As I approached the restaurant, I was trying to figure out what we could do. Hopefully Miss X would have a few good ideas, cause I sure as hell wasn't feeling too creative, especially after the events of the last couple of hours. I felt a sudden quiver shake me from top to bottom, trying to erase the "doom & gloom" feelings caused by the day's ignorant-filled realism.

There she was! She wasn't a dream, but my immediate reality. As she confidently came through the door, she

grinned and exclaimed, “Right on time, I’m impressed.” Have you had a boring morning?”

“Boring,” I replied, “that wouldn’t even begin to describe it. However, we can get into my day later. Number one on the hit parade, is the question that’s been bothering me all morning. What the hell is your name?”

She looked at me and laughed. “Do you mean we’ve had the same thoughts all morning? To be honest, I didn’t really expect you to show up. I mean I didn’t know your name, you didn’t know mine, and I figured you were just killing time this morning. But I am glad to see you again.”

“Enough, enough!” I interrupted, “what is your name?”

She slowly stuck out her tongue, licked her lips, smiled and said, “My name is Deanna, Deanna Antoinette. Now you tell me yours.”

“Well, Miss Deanna Antoinette, it is certainly a pleasure, people call me Midnite.”

“Midnite,” she said, “what kind of name is that? I don’t care what “people” call you; I want to know your real name!”

“Sorry,” I said,” but that’s my name.” She looked at me strangely, and

asked, “Why does that name sound familiar, there’s something about it I know.”

“I dunno, maybe you heard me play,” I said, “I hear my name’s starting to get around.”

“Heard you play?” she asked. “What should I have heard, and when?”

“Never mind, never mind. Maybe my ego’s just gettin’ in the way. We’ll get into it some other time.”

“Let me ask you something, Mister Midnite, what’s up with you? I mean I don’t know you for more than, what is it now, six hours, and you come off as this big mystery man. What gives?”

“You’re misinterpreting me,” I said..... “You’re a tuff one, heh. O.k. here’s the deal. I’m a college student, going to the University of Colorado at Boulder, senior year. I’m majoring in communications and music. I consider myself a musician, first and foremost. I really started gettin’ serious playing guitar when I was about ten years old. I mean I live with my ax, uh my guitar, for you non-musicians. I’ve been traveling around the country playing my music, on and off for the last four years, while going to school. This year I’ve taken a sabbatical from school so I could do this. And that’s the name of that

tune." I said. "So, my nosy friend, now that you know all about my life, hip me to yours."

"Well, that was an interesting story," she said. "I'm afraid my life is boring compared to yours."

"Try me," I said. "Something tells me you're not as boring as you think you are."

"Alright, here goes. I was born in upstate New Jersey. My father died when I was six years old. I don't really remember too much about him, except that he was really handsome, had a great sense of humor and was always really, really good to me. My mom was also a great person, a great lady. She hung in there until I was eighteen. She died of a heart attack, but I think she really died of a broken heart. You see she truly loved my father, I mean they were really in love. I am an only child and don't have any close relatives. So, I left NJ when I finished high school. Let's see that was four years ago, and I've been trying to find myself or something since that time."

"Jesus," I interjected, "you must be really lonely. Have you made many friends?"

"No, not really, I mean I've traveled around a lot. I've met many people, but no

one I'm close with. Probably because I've built a wall around myself."

"Well," I said, "hopefully things will change for you now, you know, from this point on."

"Why do you think that? Do you know something I don't.? Or are you pretending to be a psychic?" She skeptically asked me.

"No, no, nothing like that, I mean it's just a feeling I get. It ain't based on anything concrete."

"Well, do me a favor, alright?" She asked, "Just don't make me any false promises; I'm really tired of all that shit!"

"Relax, babes," I said, "don't be so uptight, but you'll see soon enough, don't worry."

"Well," Deanna said, "let's talk about happy things. I'm sorry, but sometimes I get my guard up at the wrong time and for the wrong reasons."

I thought to myself, *"I'm gonna have to be careful about what I say, until I get to know her better."* Aloud I said, "Deanna, listen. We don't know each other very well yet, so let's hold hands and go for a walk on the beach, O.K.?"

Deanna looked up at me and smiled, "That's a great idea, come on."

Deanna took my hand in hers and we walked silently for a while, occasionally stealing glances at each other, grinning and looking away.

Finally, I said, “If you had one dream in the world that you could have come true, what would it be?” Deanna appeared lost in thought, contemplative. I asked, “Haven’t you ever thought of a dream before?”

“Ooh, that’s not the problem. I just don’t know if I feel comfortable enough to tell you,” she said.

“I just thought if I knew where your heart was at, I could find out what your inner being is about, that’s all” I replied

“I’ve never known anyone like you before,” she said. “I mean, most guys are trying to get down my pants by now and you’re asking me about my quest in life.”

“You sound disappointed,” I said. “Is that what you want me to do?”

“No,” Deanna said, “this is a very refreshing change, believe me. But, getting back to my most personal dream. It is simple pleasures, really, and quite naive. Ever since I was a little girl, I’ve just wanted to know a happiness that I can’t describe too well, but I’ll try my best. It is a happiness that is

almost heavenly. A pure joy that emanates from the soul and heart of a person, not from any ulterior motives, not by a need or want from anything or anybody. And, I think it is obtainable only when it's shared with someone you love."

"That is beautiful," I said. "I think that what you're after has to come from within yourself. Then and only then, will you be able to share that kind of joy with anyone else. With anything outside of your being."

"So, what you're saying is I'm insecure, or not in tune with myself?" Deanna defensively asked.

"No, I don't get the feeling you're insecure. Actually you appear quite the opposite. What I "see" within you is the ability for you to pursue your inner quest. However, you have had to face so many bullshit obstacles that dealing with them has made you lose focus on your primary goals. I think your biggest problem is getting over the loss of your parents. You never really had any type of closure. What you should do is go through some kind of regression therapy, or do you have the ability to communicate with people from your past lives?"

"Past lives, what the fuck are you talking about*?" (I realized I had hit upon an area of sensitive matter for ninety-nine percent of the humans on this planet, or at least in the western hemisphere.)* "I'm telling you about my inner dream and you're saying I'm unable to attain it without communicating with the dead."

I could tell Deanna was completely exasperated. "I'll continue this at a later time," I said, momentarily backing away from this avenue of logic. "It's obviously not the right time for you. I was just trying to help." I knew she either thought of me as a complete nut case or she was a step above the norm and would eventually be able to assimilate this, as yet, unknown information.

Anyway, I tried to lighten up the atmosphere, told a few jokes about our surroundings, the people and the state of our country in general. Deanna was quick witted, and not only understood the gist of what I was conveying, but added her own observations on the attitudes of our society. She asked me what I had been doing since the time I had met her in the restaurant. I really didn't want to get into all the events of the past few hours, but I figured it would give me a much clearer overview of where

her head was at, intellectually, politically and emotionally.

I took a deep breath and relayed the events of the morning. She listened intently, only interrupting to ask a question, or make a comment. As I was talking, I realized she was quite a unique person, for she had a deep understanding of people, our society and life, way beyond her years, more than most people ever achieve in their entire lifetime.

When I had finished speaking, she asked if Marc was still at the cottage. "Yeah, he must be," I responded, "because what I didn't tell you before was that he gave me a lot of money to go out and buy supplies and food. I'm sure he's at home repairing the damage done by those asshole cops and making himself something to eat."

"Ok. Let's get going," she said.

"Uh, where are we going, my spontaneous one?" I inquisitively asked.

"To your place, dummy. I want to see where you're living, I want to meet Marc and I figure this'll be the best way to get to know you, ***Mr. Midnite***!"

Chapter II

(I'm Mr. Midnite)

"Hey Sarge, what are we gonna do if that long haired freak and that nigger from this morning start any shit and report us?" asked Joey D.

"Blow it out your ass, shithead," the Sarge responded. "Do you really think that could happen in a million years? The colored jerk probably can't even spell his name, and that hippie freak is probably so zoned out on every drug in the world, he doesn't even know what state he's in. Anyway, he's probably so scared that he's hitchhiked ten states away by now."

This intelligent conversation transpired between two of Daytona's "finest". The Sarge was, in reality, Sgt. Frank Scirelli, a fourteen-year veteran of Miami's mean streets. He had flunked out of high school at sixteen, drifted from job to job, until his father, who was a thirty-year veteran of the Metro-Dade police force, had "persuaded" him to get his GED, and used

influence to get him on the Miami police force.

He transferred to Daytona to get away from the bad elements of Miami, the Cubanos and Blacks that were all over his beloved streets. Frank flourished. He was a natural cop. He finally had a mission in life, to get rid of every low-life punk he ran across. He didn't care about human rights, civil rights or much else in the category of what was right. After three years on the force he had not only been promoted, but received numerous citations for arrests and convictions. He had more arrests (and complaints of brutality) than any cop on the force. Frank was god. He fanatically disliked "faggot" cops, especially those that had any kind of sympathy or empathy for an alleged criminal. To this day he couldn't understand how his beloved force had to "allow" nigger cops on the force. What was this world coming to!

Joseph DiGregorio, aka Joey D., was one of the reasons Frank thought of himself as a god-like person. Joey "babes" was a rat like mole compared to Frank's huge proportions. Frank came in at a good two hundred and seventy-five pounds, bone dry, whereas Joey D. weighed in at one hundred

and forty pounds, soaking wet. They took pride in the fact that the rest of the force had nicknamed them "Mutt & Jeff" a long time ago. They were societal outcasts who were also very dangerous. Both had a subverted and dark view of the world around them. Even their brothers on the force kept their distance from them, whenever possible, all except a select few that shared their same sick views.

"Let me ask you sumpen then, Sarge. Is the plan for Thursday still gonna happen, or what?"

"Oh, yeah. Fuckin'-a, it's gonna happen. I talked to everyone involved. They all made their excuses, you know, told their respective wives and girlfriends some story or other. Yeah, we're ready."

"Sarge, how you come up with this stuff, I mean, I can't think of nuthun like this, how the hell do you do it?" the befuddled Joey D. asked. Frank, who usually enjoyed this type of praise being bestowed upon him, suddenly became hostile, and lightly slapped the Mole on the side of his head. "What the hell was that for, what'd I freakin' do?"

"Listen to me, Joey! You didn't do nuthin', o.k.? I just want to make sure not a

whisper of this leaks out, not a whisper, you understand?"

"Frankie, you know I wouldn't say a word, you know that. Are you worried, or sumpin?"

Frank actually looked thoughtful before he carefully replied, "Well, there are gonna be twenty of us, out in the open, in the middle of the night. Plans have been carefully made to make sure none of our unsympathetic brothers are gonna be anywhere near the vicinity, but you never know who could be snooping around, for whatever reason. So, yeah, I'm worried. Anyway, my brain hurts, enough of this bullshit, let's get something to eat."

"Marc, I'd like you to meet my friend, Deanna. Deanna this is Marc and the rest of this is up to you two." Marc and Deanna linked arms and went into the kitchen together to fix some drinks.

"Shit, they seemed to hit it off with each other quick enough," Midnite thought. *"I wonder what they'll have to discuss with each other?"*

Actually, Midnite was glad to have a few minutes to himself, to think and make plans, He wanted to hook up with some pro musicians, to try out some new songs and

ideas with people who might understand what he was trying to accomplish musically. Who the hell did he know in this neck of the woods? He was drawing a blank. Midnite decided to call his friend and musical guru in N.Y.C., Carlos Ramirez. Carlos knew every musician in every town, what their schedules were, what kind of music they were into, everything about their lives that one could possibly want to know.

Midnite got excited thinking about the wealth of information that Carlos could give to him and looked up his number in his little black book, which was filled with information about the people he encountered in his travels. Midnite dialed his friend's number and waited for someone to answer. He knew it usually took about thirty rings before Carlos ever picked up the phone……...

Meanwhile, in the next room, Marc and Deanna were in deep conversation, explaining to each other how they met Midnite. They were both in awe of him as a person, as a free spirit who seemed to follow his own destiny; his personal path seemed clear in his mind.

"Let me ask you something, Marc. Do you know why he calls himself Midnite?"

Marc replied with another question, "Do you know who Midnite is, besides a new friend? Have you ever heard of Midnite in any other context?"

"What the hell are you talking about?" She excitedly asked. "What is he a celebrity or something?"

"Only to some," he replied. "Midnite is the most talked about up and coming guitarist. But he's not just another hot-shot guitarist who'll come and go with the wind. I mean he's supposed to be on the same level as Hendrix, and believe me, I would never say anything like that lightly, 'cause anyone that really can play knows Hendrix is and was the best that ever lived, bar none, and that includes on any instrument played by anyone. He was on a mental and innovative plane that was light years ahead of anyone in the world, but, you know, Midnite does have something about him that has that same ethereal quality as Jimi, that distance from people, a different level, and yet, people are drawn to him like magnets."

"Yeah," said Deanna, "he's very strange, in a good, different way, almost

holy. He's definitely driven by something other than what this world has to offer."

"I have to get Midnite in here and ask him something!" Marc exclaimed. "Hey Midnite, come here a sec, I need to ask you something!"

Midnite shouted back to hold on for a few minutes, he was in deep conversation with his friend.

A good amount of time passed before Midnite came into the room and looked inquisitively at Marc. "You called?" He asked.

"I have to know if it's true what they say about you playing lead riffs at ten years old," Marc asked. "And how did you ever get on the road at so young an age?"

"Man, you two are a nosy pair. I prefer being the mystery man, ya know?" Midnite laughed.

"No way Dude." Deanna said "I want to hear all about you, where you were born, when you left home, you get the gist."

"Yeah, the gist." Midnite replied, "You mean the gist and the rest of my life, don't you? Well, let's grab a few brews and some munchies, get comfortable and I'll tell you the saga of my life up till now, at least."

A few moments later they were situated and Midnite started recalling snippets and scenes of his life that had been stored away and forgotten for quite some time. He carefully thought to himself, however, exactly which events he would reveal to his two new friends. Some things he would never talk about to anyone, others he would reveal only to a select few.

"Well," he began, "I didn't actually do any lead riffs until I was eleven, because I didn't start playing the guitar until I was ten, so that's an exaggeration. I used to dream about playing for as long as I can remember. I mean, I have vivid memories from about age three or four. It was something I'd always known, I guess. I felt as though I was hugging a dear old friend, the first time I actually picked up a guitar- and the feeling's never left me. I mean I just played and played all the time, it was meant to be!" He emphatically exclaimed. "So, when I was eighteen I went to college at The University of Colorado, Boulder campus, where until recently, believe it or not, I was a senior. Over the past three years I have been on the road close to twelve months, plus kept up with my schoolwork. I got to play with some extraordinary musicians, learned from them and applied what I

learned into what I incorporate into my thoughts and translate it into my music, my sound. Recently, however I left school, maybe temporarily, maybe not, although I only had six more months before graduation. So please don't feel free to lecture me on that score. I've already come to grips with my decision."

"Can I ask you why?" Deanna asked.

"You can, but I'm not answering that one today. I do have my reasons." Midnite coolly responded.

Midnite drifted within his mind, recalling the events that had led him to the circumstances he found himself in at the present time. He remembered with total clarity his reasoning and motivations for his decision.

"Let me digress and as things pass my brain, I'll relay them to you," he said. "OK," he mused, "I guess things got really interesting for me right after I got out to Boulder. I was in school for about four months when I realized school was too easy and much, much too boring. I needed something to get into, musically speaking, of course," Midnite winked at Marc and Deanna blushed. "Anyway, I spoke to my

professors and the dean, I did what I had to do to get "permission" to do a real life work study and I must say, innovative program, so I could hit the road, Jack and play some music. So basically I've only been back on campus to take exams and hand in required work, on my way to some gig or other."

"Wait a minute, wait a minute!" Deanna exclaimed. "Do you mean to tell us you've been keeping up with college courses, traveling around the country and playing gigs, as you say, all at the same time?"

"Well," Midnite replied, "I've probably been doing better at traveling and playin' than at my school work, but yeah, that's basically it. I do manage to study on the road and pass my subjects. And, if I may say so, I still have a pretty high scholastic average, but who cares about that? I mean, what exactly is school going to do for me anyway? That's just the bullshit that gets you through the door, figuratively speaking, of course. I don't have any intentions of going that route. Anyway, enough about school. Where was I? Oh yeah, three years ago I took a chance, left school for a while and headed for L.A. I just left to see the world and attach myself to musicians I felt could teach, guide and help me on what I

always knew was my calling, my fate……. Enough about me, for now!”

“Tonight, we’re going to spend the night on the beach,” Midnite announced. “I want us to experience something different and unique. Believe it, or not, my buddy in NYC told me about a happening right here, in Daytona. There’s a great band playing and we’re going!” All of a sudden, everyone had a million questions and the excitement grew, as they prepared for an experience that would change their lives.

Chapter III

(The Nightmare Begins!)

Midnite was lost in thought as he and his friends headed towards the beach area. Carlos had said some big- time producers were looking for Midnite and wanted him back in NY as soon as possible. Midnite had told Carlos that he had no immediate plans to return to the Big Apple, but would keep in touch with him and let him know his plans, as he went along.

Midnite's entourage arrived at the beachfront area, just as the band, whose name was The Magic Mushrooms, finished tuning up and was making (all the) introductions. Carlos had informed Midnite that the Mushrooms were an acid rock band with a funky back section. He also said they had a kick ass drummer.

While the band was starting their first set, Midnite noticed that there were quite a few police officials in the area. Probably due to their paranoia, with so many rock aficionados around, Midnite mused. His interest returned to the Mushrooms. They were tight; all right. Midnite

appreciated the band's efforts and admitted that they would probably make it big. He also thought they were too simplistic for his tastes. However, he took a huge interest in the drummer's poly rhythmic beats. He not only kept perfect time, but flavored his playing with brilliantly improvised fills. Looking over to the side of the stage, Midnite was puzzled, as he noticed Marc talking to one of the band's security people. The man disappeared for a while, came back smiling and gave Marc "five." As Marc sat down next to him, Midnite asked him what had just transpired.

"Oh, you'll find out, soon enough", Marc slyly said.

Sure enough, about twenty minutes into the second set, the band's guitarist announced, "Ladies and gentleman, I have the honor to introduce someone you may or may not yet know, but believe me, you all will soon. Midnite, can you come onto the stage? We all want to meet you!"

Midnite quickly turned and looked at Marc, not sure if he was mad or happy to face this sudden unsolicited attention. "I'll talk to you later," he fiercely shot out, looking at Marc.

As Midnite climbed onto the stage, the band members started clapping, as did a

few people in the audience. He shook hands all around, talked to the members, then walked over to the drummer and said, "When can we get together for a jam?"

The drummer said, "My name's Sunshine, most call me Sunny. We'll be in town thru Saturday. Meet me at the Riviera Club, next to the Marriott, tomorrow morning around noon."

"'Bet," Midnite shot back, "at noon." As he was preparing to get off- stage, the band started chanting, "We want Midnite, we want Midnite" over and over. Soon the audience took up the chant. Midnite said, "I would love to, but I don't have my axe. I just wanted to say hello to you all."

The Mushroom's guitarist walked over, handed his Stratocaster to Midnite, as he said, "It would be my honor, please take it!"

Midnite took the guitar, looked it over, tuned it, and as he checked out the feel, smiled and said, "Well, I guess I have to play!"

He quickly conferred with the band as they chose a loose bluesy ballad. Suddenly Midnite's persona seemed to change. He appeared taller and totally in charge as the borrowed guitar took on a life

of its own. Simply put, he made magic, not music. As Midnite started really feeling his music, he closed his eyes and the universe poured from his fingers. As his solo reached the stratosphere, everyone in the band stopped playing, except for Sunny. Sunny's eyes were glazed with pure joy for he totally understood Midnite's madness. As Midnite opened his eyes, and returned to Earth, he once again noticed the now rapidly deploying police force.

He took the guitar strap off from his shoulder, leaned into the microphone and said, "Thank you everyone I enjoyed that! Oh, watch your backs when you leave here. Something weird's going on with the Man."

Not sure if anyone heard him, he surveyed the crowd and smiled. The audience was shouting his name; the band members were calling him to play again.

Midnite, like a wild animal, sensed the coming ebb and flow of the arena. The police were mobilizing, slowly surrounding the audience. People's awareness slowly crystallized and all was still for the moment.

Midnite again grabbed the mike and said, "I will play one more song. It's about one nation, one people, one Earth…and what we need to do to have harmony. By the

way, Mr. Police Force, the media is here covering this event. I would think twice before cracking heads and busting people. Please show these reporters just cause."

The troops stopped in their tracks as one, and looked for their captain. He was on his two-way radio.

Midnite started playing a slow rhythmic bluesy, jazzy, rock number. It was hypnotic and everyone present just stared. Some of the members of the police force actually put their shields and batons at rest. Midnite felt the tension dissipate and responded by slowly increasing the tempo. He turned towards Sunshine and indicated he should join in, then the bass and conga drums. The sound was so completely ethereal and sensual that the opposing forces actually felt empathy for each other; a mystical and heroic, though fleeting, understanding of each other.

Then a miracle occurred. The police left. The audience gave a collective sigh and immediately turned their attention back to Midnite. He was playing and singing with all the emotion that he had just felt. Midnite started composing on stage as he played. This was an experiment in real time, no rehearsal, no musical score to follow, just

pure feeling. First the lead came to him, then the melody. Suddenly words came.

"Excuse me, everybody, but I have to sing for a minute. There's something I have to let out."

Highways left behind
Only one horizon in view

Eclipsing my dreams of happiness
Yeah, something old, something new

Oh, beauteous wonders
Crying for a name!

Amerika goes under
Fools remain the same

Creativity is a fantasy
Emerald swords cut in two

Leaving two realities
One for me, one for you

Then along comes the nightmare
Electric creations disappear

Waiting for the dawn
And my dreams to re appear

Hardened to the core
Empathies grow scarce

As the universe revolves
So does humanity pass?

The witch of time flies on!

Times change/remain the same
We've already lost what was gained

Magnetic personalities
The Creator's plan
Intelligence is lost
On the ignorance of man!

The audience didn't move, Midnite stared, then said, "I guess that one's called ***"The Witch of Time!"*** Wow! That came from the events of before, the messed up state of our country, not to mention the rest of the world. I don't see many good times left for our empire. See ya all next time."

Grabbing his axe, he turned to the band, nodded and jumped off stage.

Marc and Deanna ran over to him, in a state of disbelief. "I heard about you, knew about you, but seeing you play is something beyond words," Marc said.

Deanna just said, “I think I’m in love!”

Midnite laughed while having a flashback. He remembered all the many, many practice sessions, when he was ten, eleven and twelve years old. All his friends and acquaintances thought he was obsessed with the guitar, and rightly so, he mused. He remembered all the missed football, basketball and baseball games, while he studied the masters, like Segovia, McLaughlin, Howlin’ Wolf, Larry Coryell and even a young guitarist, playing a funky Latin rock with heavy percussion, Carlos Santana.

Returning to the present, he said, “I have to go home and practice, I want to be ready for Sunny’s jam tomorrow.”

“I think you’re more than ready, man,” Marc said.

Midnite looked at him and said, “I’m never ready, there’s always more, to do, to learn”

Deanna was looking at Midnite, unsure of what to do or expect. In tune, Midnite winked and cocked his head, as if to say “Come on.”

Taking his cue, Marc winked back, "Well, I think I'll hang out for a while, have some fun!"

When Midnite and Deanna got home they looked at each other with understanding, yearning, and a profound and inexplicable need, a need for the moment, yet on a deeper level a need of two souls that have found each other. They slowly came together, intertwining their bodies, their emotions and their souls. They made love until the early rays of the sun came through their window.

That morning Midnite prepared for his rendezvous with Sunny. He played for an hour or so, then tuned his guitar and made sure he had extra strings, packed up and left. Deanna was still asleep.

Midnite decided to walk along the beach, to think about all the ramifications of his playing or auditioning. He pondered and felt good after his self- analysis, knowing his assessment was accurate, although, he mused, only time will be the judge of that.

Midnite started walking from the concrete to the sands of Daytona. Suddenly, he stopped and gasped. The site in front of him was mind-staggering. Everywhere he looked, in every position, he saw bodies

strewn about. Children, women, men, people old and young, all were among the victims. Midnite dropped his guitar, ran down to the beach and shouted, “Will someone tell me what happened here?”

A young girl and her friend, and an elderly gentleman came up next to Midnite. The girls were bleeding and scraped along their neck, shoulders and waist areas, and they had bloody thighs and calves.

The elder of the group, Mr. Bartowski, relayed the tragic events that had unfolded, although his head was bandaged with someone’s torn shirt. His face clouded and he sobbed when he recounted the horrific story.

“Well,” he said, “seems as though the transient population of Daytona was mostly camped out along the outer perimeter of the beachfront. Seems as though the police didn’t appreciate that fact. Oh my God!” He cried out “I saw it all with my own eyes! I was watching my granddaughter in the moonlight playing catch with a little boy. Then I saw the monstrosity. A prowl car positioned itself directly parallel to its counterpart, about 20 feet away. Underneath their cars, they somehow secured a 4-inch solid metal pipe, so both prowl cars could mow down the inhabitants. There were four

other pairs of police cars, all rigged the same way. They then proceeded in a staggered row, so they could get anyone in their path; there were no spaces between the cars. Seems as though their plan worked," he sobbed.

Midnite was in shock. *"Were these human beings that could perpetrate such an inhuman deed? Was this condoned by the police hierarchy? It must have been,"* he thought, *"because there were too many cops involved, at the same time."* Midnite had also noticed there was a "police presence" blocking the access roads to the area. *"Alright,"* he reflected, *"this is scary. Amerikan cops doing this to Amerikan people, Wow!"*

Midnite went through the crowds getting people who weren't too badly hurt to help their less fortunate comrades. He was feeling more and more helpless and frustrated. How could this happen, how, how? Why? What warped system could allow this, think of it, do it. *"My God,"* he thought, as a fleeting prescient vision entered his mind, *"what will our country turn into?"* The beach thinned out as ambulances, friends and family took their people home, to the hospital, anywhere away from this madness.

After things calmed down and most of the people had cleared the area, Midnite stopped and spoke to two of the remaining men who had helped out. One was a fellow longhaired musician, Duane; the other gent, Walter, was, as it turned out, a Black artist who had come down to Daytona to paint sunrises.

As the three of them were discussing the unreality of the recent events, a school bus pulled up alongside them. Midnite thought it was another volunteer group who wanted to help transport the remaining injured people. Suddenly, without warning, armed police filed off the bus and surrounded the three acquaintances. Without any words or preamble, they simultaneously drew their batons, tightening the circle around Midnite and his companions until they were almost touching them. Before anyone had time to utter a word, the Sarge looked cruelly at Midnite and bellowed out, "Now!" The police started hitting Midnite and his likewise unarmed acquaintances until all three were brutally beaten unconscious.

Chapter IV

(Nightmare Reality)

Midnite came to a few hours later, his head throbbing, and he felt sticky blood on his scalp and face. He thought his eyes were open, but he couldn't see anything. Sudden fear shot through him as he foggily remembered what had occurred just before he lost consciousness. He shouted out "Help, what are you doing to me? Where am I? Walter, Duane, are you here, can you hear me?" No one answered, but he faintly heard some long drawn out moaning. Midnite heard footsteps draw near. "Hello, who's there?" he nervously asked.

"Shut the fuck up or I'll knock your ass out again, you nigger- lovin' shithole." Midnite shuddered as he recognized the Sarge's demented voice. And he shut up.

Midnite kept slipping in and out of consciousness, slowly regaining some kind of coherent memory. He had no idea how much time had elapsed, and realized he was blindfolded and not able to see. Hopefully, his eyesight was ok. As more time went by, Midnite recognized that he was thirsty and hungry. He heard laughter and obscenities

emanating from the front of the bus. Although he wanted to, he didn't call out, for fear of some sort of reprisal from his psychotic captors. He noticed the bus slowing down and pulling off the road. Hearing the sound of a fuel nozzle clanking and people talking outside, near the window he was closest to, he decided to try and listen to the conversation. He heard the distinctive chiming and the sound of change being put into a phone.

"Yeah, boss, we just crossed into Georgia. Got three more commie hippies for ya. Coupla 'em look pretty strong and got one prime buck too. No, no one knows anything, nobody saw us, or if they did, they didn't give a shit. These guys are probably all homeless assholes anyway. We should be there in about six hours or so." Midnite quickly scrambled away from the window, back to his position in the aisle of the bus. *"What could be going on? Where are we going and what do they plan to do to us when we get there?"*

An eternity passed when finally, the bus slowed, brakes squealed and Midnite could hear the sound of tires on a dirt road. The road dust came through the windows and settled on the inhabitants of the bus.

People coughed and swore. Chains rattled and curses filled the air, when Midnite heard a scream, grunts, and then more screams. "Walter, Duane, are you ok?" he asked.

He heard a voice say, "When I say shut up, I mean shut the fuck up!" Then he was pounded in the stomach with the butt end of a rifle. Midnite rolled away and once again felt severe pain shoot through his torso. He heard the distinct sound of a hydraulic door open and close and footsteps drawing nearer. Suddenly, his blindfold was ripped off his face. It took Midnite's eyes a minute to adjust to the blinding daylight. The first thing he saw was a big- gutted, nasty, cruel looking man in front of him, with a scar across his left cheek, which was red and raw. He was not in a good mood.

"Get the fuck up and get off this shittin' bus, now", he growled. Midnite did as he was told. He limped down the stairs of the bus and slowly looked around. He saw what looked like barracks on three sides of a lake. Men were all over the grounds, performing different functions. Some were preparing food, others were tending a garden, and still others were digging holes, for what reason he had no idea. A man with chains on his feet came ambling over to Midnite. He was unkempt, slovenly, needed

a shave and a bath. He was smiling as he said, “Newbies, heh? You’ll be a sorry son of a bitch before this is over, you poor asshole.”

Midnite asked him, “What is this place, where are we? What are we doing here and why?”

“Can’t talk now,” he whispered. “But I’ll get around to you later. He held out his hand and said, “Name’s Roger, and you?” Midnite told him his name and thanked him for his kindness. “C’mon, follow me,” he said.

Roger ambled along, muttering to himself. He was looking furtively around as a weasel does when on the lookout for predators. Periodically, he’d stop in his tracks and slowly turn his head to the right and left, then resume his steps. He repeated these antics four times before he led Midnite into the slovenly, dark, dank barracks, where Midnite counted fourteen cots and various cooking utensils, pots, pans and many, many mice running through the unwashed dishes.

“Well,” Roger said, “This is home. Good luck and don’t look the keepers in the eyes and always say yes sir, no sir and never speak first. You follow those rules, you’ll be okay! We’ll talk when the guards over there aren’t watchin’ us, cause you guys are new

and they're expecting trouble. So be cool and keep a low profile."

Midnite tried to gather his brain into a cohesive state of being. His nightmare had no way out; his mind couldn't fathom this unreality that was real and now. His surroundings, his bruises and pain attested to that. He looked outside the doorway to see if he could find any clues as to the whereabouts of Walter and Duane, but it was to no avail. He turned around and looked for a place to take a piss, within the barracks, but that search came up empty as well. The doorway blackened and Midnite had an eerie feeling as he slowly turned to see the Sarge grinning stupidly at him.

"Betcha never saw this one comin', did ya, nigger- lover?" the Sarge drawled. "We don't cottin' to hippies or niggas and we especially don't cottin' to no nigga lovin' hippies, if you get my drift. Get your slop in an hour, then be prepared to start workin'. We ain't wastin' no time here, boy!" He drunkenly bellowed. Midnite lowered his head and stood there, not looking the Sarge in the eyes. Without a word, the drunken man turned and left.

A few minutes later Roger returned. "Your nigger friend ain't doing too well," he

said. “And your other friend is throwing up and shivering in a corner, balled up like a baby.”

He didn’t report this in an unfriendly way, but in an understanding, sympathetic tone. “If ya gotta take a shit or a piss, there’s a latrine behind the barracks, but don’t take too long in there or they’ll come and drag your ass out, bare naked.”

“How long have you been here?” Midnite asked. “What is this place? How is this legal? Doesn’t anyone know about this place? Who’s responsible for this?” Midnite blurted out. Roger quickly took his arm and moved Midnite away from the doorway.

“Keep your voice down and don’t ever ask anyone those questions, or you’ll be dead, sure as shit!” He leaned over and whispered in Midnite’s ear. “I’ve been here four years, give or take, I’ve sorta lost track of time. Far as I can tell the cops are pals with the Georgia and Florida government people, so we’re free labor, slaves of the state. Either you stay here or you’re killed, there ain’t no middle ground. There can’t be no witnesses on the outside.”

“What do we do while we’re here?” Midnite asked.

“Mainly, we build roads, sometimes houses for the higher ups, sometimes

landscaping for ‘em, you know, shit like that. They tell people we’re on a work release program.”

Midnite was perplexed. “If they get into civilization like that, doesn’t anyone escape or tell the neighbors or other cops?”

Roger smiled sadly and said that the only person he knew who had tried had been captured and ended up in the looney bin, because no one believed him. “I mean who would believe a “convict’s” word over a governor or mayor, or even some asshole cop? You get the picture? ‘Sides we save them hundreds of thousands of dollars. Think of it, no pay for labor. It’s a sweet deal for them. Come on, we gotta get outside an’ get some grub. It’s gross, but it’s all you’ll get, so get used to it. It’s the means to surviving, staying strong and doing what you have to do!” Roger forcefully said.

“Gotcha,” Midnite said. “But I gotta take a piss before we get that mess. Wait for me I’ll be right back”

When Midnite got out of the latrine, Roger was nowhere around. He saw other men ambling over to the mess area. No one looked happy. When he drew nearer, everyone looked at him, some with apprehension, some with fear and still others with hatred. Midnite did as Roger had told

him to do. He kept his eyes averted because he didn't need or want any confrontations. He didn't yet know the hierarchy within the inmate society, nor what their functions were. He also reasoned that many of these men were not criminals, just ordinary people caught up in unjust and unordinary circumstances. He did raise his eyes to search for his friends but they were, as yet, unseen. He hoped they fared well.

Midnite was given a metal plate on which were thrown some potatoes, a meat-like concoction, consisting of things he was afraid to even think about, and a slice of stale bread. Five minutes later, he noticed everyone going over to a giant sink and throwing their utensils and plates into it, then lining up, double row, as if waiting for the next, expected part of their tribulations. Midnite did the same. The prisoners filed outside to an area that resembled a designated school bus pick-up section of the parking lot. Midnite soon saw why they were there. Three guards split the group into three separate lines and herded them onto three buses. Midnite noticed that the majority of individuals within the groups knew what to do and basically complied without resistance of any kind. Midnite visually searched the groups and finally

found who he was looking for. Duane was at the end of the second line and Walter was mid-section in the first line. *"Hmm, they split us up,"* he thought. *"Each of us is in a separate line and nowhere near each other."* He noticed Walter looked terrified and Duane was looking frantically about. He found Midnite and they locked eyes. Duane gave him an expression like "what the hell is going on?" Midnite shrugged and smiled at him, trying to tell him to play it cool. He didn't know anything either, but he was starting to put the pieces together.

Suddenly, he was grabbed by the arm and one of the guards said "Stop fuckin' dreamin' and get on the bus, asshole."

Midnite complied and walked up the three steps onto the bus. He warily looked at his surroundings and watched the movements of the guards, as well as those of his fellow inmates. He noticed the guards were all armed, not only with side arms, which he saw were 38 specials, a favorite NYC firearm, but also with sawed-off 12 gauge shotguns. These boys were not fooling around and not taking any chances. After everyone had taken their assigned seats, the guards went up and down the aisles, placing everyone's left foot into an anchored chain, which was bolted into the

floorboards of the bus. Once this was completed, the buses started rolling. Midnite figured the time to be around 8 am. No one spoke as they travelled over dusty roads overgrown with plant life. Midnite mentally took note of the distance, various landmarks and (especially any) crossroads they passed. There were no street signs. About forty-five minutes into the journey, he noticed the other two buses veering off in another direction from the one his bus was taking. He estimated about an hour and a half had gone by, when the bus slowed down and finally stopped alongside a ditch on the side of the road.

One of the guards, a quiet no-nonsense individual with a resigned look about him, shouted, "All right, as soon as your leg irons are removed, file off the bus and await your orders." The inmates did as they were told and waited alongside the bus. The three guards in the bus then exited the vehicle. Midnite looked up and to the west as he heard the roar of an approaching vehicle. It was another, slightly smaller bus. Upon inspection, Midnite saw that it was full of guards. *"Huh –Oh",* he thought, *"this can't be good."* Six guards came off the bus and lined up in front of the inmates. The bus

that they came on then drove away. These guards were raucous and unnerving. They were spitting and swearing and looked to be having a cheerful time. For three minutes. Then they turned towards the inmates and went through a total personality transformation.

"Ok, you scum," the apparent leader of this group screamed out, "who is new here? Who has arrived this week?" Midnite and two others raised their hands. The guards took off their sunglasses and assessed them with eyes that reminded Midnite of the eyes of vipers just before they strike.

"I'm gonna say this once and only once," the guard closest to Midnite whispered with a straight face. "You have any ideas of escaping, you have any ideas of not working, you have any ideas at all, we'll find out, and when we do, you will pay. Oh yeah, you'll surely pay, sure as shit. Slack off and don't work, first time, a day and a night in the sweatbox. Second time, we hang you upside down, no water no food. There ain't a third time, believe you me. Go on the lam, we'll catch yuh. We'll bring you back, you'll wish we hadn't."

Midnite got it. That and much more. He knew he had to try to escape. He had to be free, play his guitar, it was calling his

name. His friends had no idea what had happened, not to mention his family. Oh man his family! What could they be thinking? He also came to the conclusion that he wouldn't survive in this perverse and fascist environment. It was just a matter of time before something happened and it wouldn't be good.

Weeks went by, the routines were the same; monotony and ignorance were the rule of each day. The guards were brutal, uncaring, sadistic and psychotic. Midnite did his best to stay as far away from them as he could, whenever possible. No one talked to each other, unless it was in hurried monosyllables, to cite a warning, to pass a note or to give a message to another inmate.

On a morning during the second month of existence in this god-forsaken place, Midnite was getting dressed and preparing for another day of road clearing, when he heard some blood- curdling sounds emanating from nearby. He cautiously looked out of his barracks and saw the guards dragging Walter by his legs across the mess area and away from the barracks. His body was scraping across the rocks and plants while his head bumped violently against the same rocks that tortured his

body. Another guard came over and picked Walter up by his armpits. Then they dumped him, head first, into the sweatbox. Midnite could no longer see the three men, as the door to the sweatbox was only partially open and was at an angle that prevented his vision of the interior. Midnite noticed Roger edging his way over, toward the sweat box for a better look. Roger was grimacing and his body started twitching. Suddenly he turned and ran towards Midnite. He came up to Midnite, grabbed him by the arm and said

"They're hanging him upside down, for God's sake."

"What happened? What did he do?" Midnite asked.

"All's I know is he started talking weird and screaming at the guards. Something about they had no right to keep him here and he was going to leave. So, they snatched him and you saw the rest. I don't know if anything else happened before that," Roger said.

"Any idea how long they'll keep him in there?" Midnite asked.

"There's no telling. I've seen them let someone out in an hour and I've seen them keep someone in there for two days. You just don't know. Depends on how

fucked up the guards or the warden feels," he said.

"Well," Midnite said, "It must be 90 degrees and it's only 9 o'clock or so. It'll probably get to 120 or 130 degrees in there, before long. He won't be able to stand it for long without dehydrating. Shit, being Black ain't gonna help him none, not with these assholes. They just look for an excuse to fuck someone over, freakin' sadistic sons of bitches."

On the bus, going to the day's road building session, as Midnite now thought of it, he thought of how his escape plan was progressing. So far he had managed to find a large glass soda bottle, an eighteen-inch piece of rubber tubing and a bandana. He was not quite sure what he was going to do, but he felt, based on his findings, that it was becoming evident. He hid the items near where he "hid" when he had to go to the bathroom. When they moved on to a different section of road, he had a tricky time moving them. He found if he stuffed the bottle into his crotch, he could move about unnoticed. The tube and rag he merely stuffed in his pockets. Finally, the day's work was finished and the inmates and guards got on the bus. It was so hot the

guards didn't even bother to harass their keep. They did, however, pass around a jug of moonshine and proceeded to get drunk. This continued until the bus reached the compound.

Soon thereafter, Roger found Midnite and said, "I can't believe it, but Walter's still in there. No one brought him water or even checked in on him. It's not good."

"Shit," Midnite thought. "I have to do something."

He left Roger standing there and ran to the warden's office. Knocking on the door, he waited for a response. A big blond, with her blouse half undone and lipstick smeared across her cheek, opened the door. The look of amazement on her face registered quickly with Midnite.

"Hey, honey," she chirped. "there's an inmate standing here. There ain't supposed to be an inmate here, is there? There's never an inmate here, there ain't supposed to be an inmate here," she repeated again.

"What the fuck are you talking about, an inmate?" the warden bellowed, as he came to the door. He just stared at Midnite for a full minute. Then he slowly said "What the fuck are you doing here? An

inmate has NEVER come here uninvited, NEVER!" he screamed.

Midnite remained calm and said "I'm sorry sir, but I just wanted to say that the inmate, Walter has been hanging in the sweatbox since early this morning."

"Oh, so you want to join him, you queer bastard?" the warden snickered. "That's the only reason I can understand why you'd have the balls to come here. You know you in a heap of trouble, now, don't you boy? Say, ain't you that nigger lover that gave Scirelli such a hard time back in Daytona? Where is your nigger boyfriend now? Didn't try to help you, now did he? I'll tell you what, fuck face, since you have these balls and actually came to my office, I'll go have a look see about your friend. Go to your barracks and stay there. I haven't figured out what your punishment is gonna be yet."

Midnite said, "Thank you, warden," and turned to leave.

The warden grabbed his arm and asked, "Why the fuck are you stickin' your nose into someone else's biness? Why you give a shit about some nigger?"

Midnite looked at the warden's hand on his arm and simply said "He's a human being, Warden, now isn't he?"

Midnite turned and walked out the door and back down the steps.

"Yup," he thought, *"I am nuts and I probably will be joining that poor bastard."*

As Midnite entered his sleeping quarters, he heard a commotion. Three of the guards had opened the door to the sweatbox; the warden was standing behind them. They were muttering and whispering excitedly to each other. The warden pointed into the sweatbox and then pointed towards the woods. Midnite saw Roger peering over the shoulder of the guard closest to the warden. He looked over at Midnite and shook his head sadly. Then he took his finger and ran it across his throat, turned away and disappeared. Midnite knew what that meant. Walter was dead.

Midnite had a vision of his life before he entered this hellhole. He thought of his parents, his sisters, his close friends back home and of Marc and Deanna. "They must be frantic, wondering where he'd disappeared to, wondering what had happened.

"It's been somewhere around four months now and I have a feeling some bad shit's about to go down. I can just feel the

oozing of evil, of cover-ups and an end to the way this camp is run."

The end, he knew, would not be a good one.

Marc was on the phone; Deanna was sitting across the room in Midnite's rented house. They still believed Midnite was alive. They refused to give up hope. Marc got off the phone. Deanna looked up, hopefully. Marc just shook his head and said "No, nothing new. My friends who've been checking the hospitals and police stations say nothing has showed up. No reports, no witnesses to what happened, no nothing. Let me ask you, Deanna, do you think he just left us? Are we the crazy ones?"

Deanna looked at him with dismay.

"I hope you don't really need to ask that dumb question. You know what kind of person he is, how he helped you, even before he knew you. He always thinks of the other person, how he can help them, make their lives better than it was before they knew him. Yes, it's true, we only knew him for a few days before he disappeared, but I know it wasn't by his own volition, I just know it. Think about it, we found his guitar on the beach. He would never, ever, leave his beloved guitar anywhere. He was

abducted or something," she vehemently said.

"I know, I know," Marc replied, "It just is so bizarre. It must have something to do with the insane events on the beach that morning. I mean, he went to help the injured and then just disappeared. It is too much of a coincidence. What's truly weird is that nothing was in the papers, nobody talked about it on the streets and everybody left the beach which, I guess, was what the powers that be intended all along. So, where do we go from here? What else can we do? I've been thinking about two scenarios….."

Marc let that thought linger, as Deanna looked at him inquisitively,

"The first is to hire an attorney, or a private eye. The second is to go to the newspapers to open an investigative report."

He looked at Deanna, who was deep in thought.

She looked up and said, 'We'll have to hire the private dick first. We will need something substantive with which to go to the newspapers. I do like the way you're thinking."

"In addition," Marc interjected, "we'll be able to stay behind the scenes, so nothing will happen to us personally. This is

too big a case for us to be bold, at least initially."

"Yeah, I hear you. I agree. How do we start?" Deanna asked.

Midnite knew he had to make his move more quickly than he would have liked. However, from the activity going on around the camp, he knew his time, as well as everyone else's, would become even more insane, or even deadly. Duane had complained loudly when he had seen Walter's dead body being dragged in death the way he had been dragged while alive, but this time the guards had brought him to the wooded area of the camp. The guards didn't return for an hour and nobody saw them when they did return…. And nobody asked what they had done, except for Duane.

Duane freaked out and ran up to one of the guards screaming, "What the fuck have you done? Are you all inhuman bastards? You're killing people for profit and free labor. You bunch of sadistic, greedy assholes."

The warden came out of his barracks and motioned to two of the guards. One of them came up behind Duane and hit Duane on the back of his head with his revolver. Duane immediately slumped to the ground,

unconscious. They then dragged him and hung him in the sweatbox, without saying a word. They walked away smirking and laughing and giving each other high fives. They walked about twenty feet from the sweatbox and stopped.

The warden slowly walked to the middle of the courtyard and in a low eerie voice said, “The next inmate that talks before being spoken to, that complains about anything, that doesn’t do his work detail exactly as told, or the next of ya’ll scum that comes to my office uninvited or pisses me off in any way, will suffer so much ya’ll will wish you had it as easy as that loud mouthed piece of shit in the sweatbox now.”

He slowly turned in a circle and pointed his finger at Midnite. “Ain’t you the one that came in with those two loudmouths?” he asked in his low voice.

Midnite looked down at the ground and simply said “Yes.”

“Well, mister with no real name, if I see you at my office again, or if you complain about anything, you’ll be the first one in that box, ya hear!” Midnite continued to look at the ground, his mind seething with held in emotion. The warden screamed, “I’m talking to you, boy.”

Midnite turned around and walked away, then stopped, turned back around and said, “Don’t you have anyone you love, Mr. Warden, sir?”

He looked the warden in the eye and turned back around and into his barracks.

Two of the guards went to go after Midnite but the warden shouted out, “Stop! I will take my time with that one. Leave him be…. for now…..”

That night, Midnite was lying on his cot, when one of the guards entered. He stood in the doorway, took off his glasses and looked around.

“You’re alone, ain’t you, boy?” Midnite looked at him and nodded.

“Warden wants to see you, boy, let’s go”

Midnite knew this wasn’t going to be pleasant and steeled himself for what was to come. The guard had Midnite walk in front of him and gave verbal commands to keep moving. It wasn’t to the warden’s office, however, but past the pond and about a quarter mile into the woods.

“Here’s where I die,” Midnite thought.

They stopped at an area that had a picnic bench and a barbecue pit. The warden

was there with three guards and the warden's mistress, the same one who had answered the door when Midnite had brazenly gone to his office.

"Well, boy," he said, "you know you could be in a heap of trouble now, don't ya?"

Midnite looked at him and said, "Yeah, I figure this is where I die."

"Die?" the warden queried, then said "No, boy, there's something different about you. You have the biggest balls I've ever seen, but you use them to help other people, even if your ass is on the chopping block. I want to get to know you."

"How so?" Midnite asked. "What do you mean by "get to know" me?"

The warden simply said, "We'll see."

He nodded at one of the guards, who took Midnite by the arm and nodded for him to move. He escorted him back to the barracks, which had mysteriously filled back up with his fellow inmates.

"Never thought we'd see you again", one of them said.

Another one chimed in with "No one's ever come back from "The Woods"

"What the fuck happened?" a few of them asked simultaneously.

Midnite glanced around and looked them in the eyes. “We shall see,” he said.

Midnite knew that whatever the warden had planned or was going to plan wasn’t good and probably was very bad.

“It will be time to move up my, as yet, unplanned plan, but I must get away from here,” he thought.

Chapter V

(More Clues)

The next morning Midnite woke up with a start. Roger was shaking him and whispering for him to get up.

"The warden wants to see you, pronto!" he said.

Midnite thought, *"Oh shit, what now? It's early and this won't be good."*

Midnite turned to Roger and said, "Hold on a minute, I gotta take a piss, wait here."

Midnite needed time to think. He went to the latrine and closed the door.

"I guess there's nothing I can do until I know what the warden's plan is for me, one way or the other."

He went back outside, stretched, yawned and said, "Okay Rog, let's do it."

They went directly to the warden's barrack and waited outside. A few minutes later the warden emerged with two guards in tow. He nodded to Roger to leave. Roger looked at Midnite, turned and walked away, shaking his head and mumbling to himself.

"Well," the warden said, "looks as though your long haired friend over there

went crazy last night. He tried to hang himself and this morning he is totally insane, talking all kinds of shit that don't make sense. So, since he was with you when he came in, I have something for you to do."

Midnite, thinking like a compassionate human being, sarcastically said, "Do you want me to take care of him and nurse him back to health?"

The warden looked at Midnite; smiled, then laughed as though that were the funniest thing he'd ever heard.

"No," he said slowly. "I want you to take him into the woods and kill him."

Midnite felt as though he had sustained another blow to the head. He absorbed that directive and looked the warden in the eye and said "Are you insane or just totally inhumane?"

The warden immediately stopped smiling, came over to Midnite and bellowed, "Don't you ever speak to me like that!"

He proceeded to hit Midnite in the stomach. As Midnite doubled over, the warden screamed, "If you don't kill him, you'll be the dead one, boy, you got that?"

Midnite gasped out, "Well, then, I'm dead. How you gonna do it? Have your 'boys' here do it for you, so your hands are clean?"

Midnite slowly walked towards the warden. The guards started to intercept him, but the warden waved them off.

Midnite leaned close to the warden's head and whispered in his ear, "You know they say only very insecure and scared people rule by brute force and intimidation and have others carry out their plans, because they're the ones who don't have the balls that they accuse everyone else of not having."

The warden turned red, then bright red and started hyperventilating. The guards grabbed Midnite, as the warden screamed, "Put him in the box, fuckin' now!"

Marc was speaking to Deanna in a hushed voice, almost as though someone would overhear them, although they were alone. "Ok," he said. "It's done! I hired a private dick, an ex-cop from Daytona. His name is Mike O'Rourke. He still has buddies on the force and will see what he can find out. It will probably take time, but it's our best bet. Actually, after all the bozos I've interviewed, he's our only bet."

Deanna looked sad, but said, "I know, it's been a long haul going nowhere fast. At least now there may be a glimmer of hope. Time will tell."

"Yeah, but the thing I'm really worried about is this double-edged sword," Marc said. "I mean he is an ex-cop. Will his loyalties really lie with us, or with his ex-buddies on the force?"

"Well, what criteria did you use to evaluate his qualifications?" Deanna asked.

"I judged him to be an honest, straight-shooting individual," Marc replied. "and he also seemed to truly care about justice. When I described the night and morning on the beach, the carnage and destruction, the wounded and the dead, he seemed to be truly mortified, and he immediately said he wanted the case."

Midnite was dragged, pushed, and kicked as they brought him to the sweatbox. The guards opened the door, lowered the chain that had handcuffs attached to both ends and which hung from the middle of the box. Then the officers cuffed his ankles and violently raised him upside down and left, slamming the door. Midnite felt light-headed and scared. And utterly alone. He knew that although the temperature wasn't yet intolerable, it was still early morning.

"Ok," he thought, *"time to shut myself off. Meditate, use my discipline."*

That part of his plan worked for about three hours, when he came out of his self-imposed meditation. He was sweating profusely, and was very, very thirsty and hungry. He estimated the temperature to be about 110 degrees. He was starting to freak out, when he stopped himself.

"I can't let them win, can't think about water or food. I'll think about my loved ones, my music and what I'm going to do, if and when I get out of here."

Midnite went into a sort of dissociative disconnect. He was in the sweatbox, but he wasn't. His mind went in and out of playing tricks.

"I'm a self-imposed mind magician. I'll plan my escape, while I'm in here. Am I crazy?" he thought. *"Will I even get out of here? Yes, I will, because this is physical, I can endure until my body gives out."*

Midnite drifted and meandered through his mind. He conjured up memories of his youth, his family, his musical gifts, his leadership abilities and the reasons why people liked, loved and enjoyed being around him so much.

Midnite regressed back in time as if in a dream. He watched himself, lying in bed, mumbling to himself, "Damn, got to get on the road, play some music, make some

money, be myself, stop stagnating, find a lady or two, learn more about life."

He reached for his guitar, strumming it lovingly, caressing it as he would a woman. He started playing. Love notes poured from his guitar, from his head, from his heart.

Suddenly he was aware of someone calling his name. It was his friend and roommate Chris.

"Jesus Christ, Midnite, it's freakin' four o'clock in the morning. Don't you ever put that thing down?"

"Sorry Chris, I didn't realize what time it was, but as long as you're up, I just want to let you know that we have to talk when you wake up, ok?"

Chris managed a weak up and down movement with his head and promptly fell back asleep. Midnite laughed, shaking his head and thinking how well the innocent sleep.

As he put down his guitar he resumed his reverie, *"I've been out of school for six months now. Thank goodness I graduated early from high school. I decided I will go to college and that means I'll have to leave in a few days. New York was a great place to grow up, it gave me my insight learning about many peoples and their*

cultures, enabling me to "fit in" anywhere. I've played with some of the best players on this planet. Philly was great, Boston was great. But now it's time ***for me!*** *There's something else I have to do."*

Midnite was confused, drifting in and out of sleep. He knew destiny had him in its hold and he had to go with it…. It was almost his time!

As the sun started shining through the window, Midnite woke up with a start. He looked over to where Chris had been sleeping and was relieved to see he had already left for class. He jumped into the shower and washed his body and his hair. When he got out, he went over to the mirror and looked searchingly at himself.

"It's time, I can really feel it," he thought.

Suddenly, he grabbed for his razor and started shaving off his beard, the beard he had been growing since his face only had peach fuzz on it. A new image for a new chapter! He remembered the times he had "gone away" for a while, not telling family, friends, or anyone else where he went on these junkets of musical exploration. Boston, Philly and of course NYC were all old hat and familiar ground for him. He had

jammed with some of the greats of rock and jazz. His calling was suddenly different, almost desperate, as if there were a clock ticking in his mind and in his life. He couldn't, as yet, fully visualize his conceptions, but they had matured to a point that he knew destiny had something in store for him. Tomorrow the next chapter of his life would begin.

Midnite came back to the present with a start. He was dizzy, nauseous, scared and unsure of his physical state. He knew the sweatbox was taking its toll on both his body and his mind. He no longer had an idea of how long he had been there. He realized he was so dehydrated and thirsty that his body wasn't even sweating any longer. He was beyond hunger, to the point where he was no longer hungry.

"Well, this is one way to get rid of those toxins and purify my body," he wryly thought, while grimacing with the pain.

Midnite knew he probably didn't have much time left, either to plan his escape or to figure out a way to convince the warden that he would do his bidding, if he survived "the box". Midnite thought he heard a slight knocking noise, then yes, it

got louder. He heard Roger's voice calling to him, asking if he was alive.

"I think so," Midnite answered, "but not by much, I'm sure. How long have I been in here?"

Roger replied, "Two and a half days. I think I heard them saying they were coming for you in a while."

"Oh God, I hope so," Midnite weakly mumbled.

Roger was gone.

"He'd probably seen the guards approaching," Midnite thought.

Suddenly, he was blinded when the door was thrown open. The warm air rushing in actually felt cold. The guards released the shackles from Midnite's ankles and let him drop with a thud. Mysteriously, they didn't make fun of him or taunt him in anyway, almost as if they respected him. They actually helped him to his feet, because he was so weak from being hung upside down and not eating or drinking anything for a long period of time. Then, the warden appeared. He was grinning from ear to ear.

"Now, don't you look a sight?" he said." Feeling a little woozy or hungry? Do you have to take a shit? Didn't piss yourself, did you?"

He was rubbing his hands together with glee.

Midnite thought, *"What a sick fuck this guy must be. Truly fucked in the head."*

Suddenly, as if in a bi-polar daze, he stopped laughing, came over to Midnite, grabbed his shirt, brought Midnite's face to his and said aloud, "Now are you ready to do whatever I say, or do you want to do that again?"

Midnite looked the warden in the eyes and said, "Oh no, boss, you won. Whatever you want me to do, I'm there."

The warden was beside himself. "Well, that wasn't so hard, now was it? Throw him in the shower, give him something to eat and then bring him to me."

Still weak, but much better, Midnite actually felt mentally powerful though not yet, physically strong. He figured he'd have to listen to and take some shit from the warden, but he was as prepared as he could possibly be after the ordeal he had been through.

The same guard who took Midnite out of the box came for him and simply said, "The warden, let's go."

He followed the guard, to the same spot in the woods. Suddenly he gasped, for

standing next to the warden was the sick fuck Scirelli. He had no expression on his face and he was looking down at the ground. As Midnite drew nearer, he slowly looked up, took off his sunglasses, pretending to clean them. Then he put them back on, looked directly at Midnite and grinned his evil grin. Next to him was the warden.

"Midnite, in spite of myself, I like you, that's why you're still alive. You are fuckin' different; I'll give you that." the warden looked bewildered as he continued speaking. "You are fuckin' lucky, you won't have to make a decision about your friend, he's "disappeared", if you get my drift." He smirked and winked at Midnite. Midnite wanted to puke directly on the warden. He held his tongue and said nothing. He just shrugged and looked the warden in the eye.

Obviously surprised, the warden said, "Now that is some attitude adjustment, I'm proud of you. Okay, boy, I'm going to put you in charge of the boys in your barracks."

Scirelli jumped forward, but the warden put an arm across his chest, stopping him.

"Whoa there, Scirelli, sit boy, down" The Sarge's face turned red with rage and

humiliation. Midnite couldn't help but smirk, which enraged the Sarge even more.

Midnite asked, "What does that entail, exactly?"

"Well," the warden said, "that means you get them up and fed in the morning. You get them out and lined up for the bus detail and then you get their asses off the bus and out to work. We'll give you the work itinerary for the day. After a week of this, if all goes well, you'll be entitled to some perks."

Midnite looked at him quizzically. The warden laughed and said, "Perks, you know, maybe you'll get better food, maybe you can get laid once in a while, maybe you won't have to actually do any work, just watch and help the guards."

"Well, besides the fact that the men will probably hate me for my elevated status, it sounds good."

Scirelli, who had been silently fuming, couldn't contain himself any longer.

"Excuse me, sir," he exploded. "And I don't mean no disrespect, but do you know what the fuck you are doing?"

The warden turned towards Scirelli and slowly and quietly said "I know exactly what I'm doing. You just keep on bringing me some more boys and don't ever question

what or how I administer my duties. You got that, Sergeant?"

Scirelli walked over and shoved Midnite hard, Midnite was ready and stood in a mule stance. He did not move. The guards all glanced at each other, then at the warden. The warden had a look of disbelief on his face, but said nothing. Scirelli looked at Midnite, pushed past him and scrambled away without another glance back.

Marc was sitting in O'Rourke's office, waiting patiently.

The receptionist looked up, apologetically and said, 'I'm sorry sir, he's just finishing up a phone call."

Marc looked at her, smiled and nodded. He continued to read through some magazines. Ten minutes later, she picked up the phone, looked at Marc and told him he could now enter the inner office. Marc and O'Rourke went through their formalities, Marc waited for him to start the conversation.

O'Rourke looked through his notes, sighed aloud and said, "Okay, it's not pretty, it's not definitive, but it's what I got so far. Seems as though one of the sergeants had a hard on for your boy, uh, for Midnite. He had interfered with an altercation, involving,

uh, you, as it turns out. This Sarge, uh, Scirelli, coincidentally organized an illegal raid on the transient population living on the beach, to "clean it up", I believe your Midnite guy and some others were herded onto a bus. After that, at least so far, I can't find any more information, but I'm still working on it. It's fuckin' weird, I'll tell you that. I know Scirelli; he's a nut job, certifiable. He's scary, yeah real scary and sick in the mind. He's a real pervert. Hangs out with this dumb as-a-rock kid, Joey D, who looks up to him as though Scirelli's the reincarnation of Jesus himself."

"What the fuck!" Marc screamed. "What do you mean there's no more information. Doesn't anybody know anything? Where could they have taken him?"

"As of now, I don't know. What I've done is called in some favors with a friend of mine, who is now, as we speak, trying to trace the bus. I'm pretty sure it was a police bus, or paddy- wagon type vehicle because they were trying to keep a low profile."

Marc calmed himself down and asked, "How long before you'll be able to trace the bus? Has anybody ever heard of an incident like this before? Do you have any

theories on what exactly happened? Do you think Midnite is still alive?"

"Whoa, whoa," O'Rourke said, "you just asked me ten questions." At that moment the phone on his desk started ringing. O'Rourke picked it up, with a pencil in his other hand. He started writing and said into the phone,

"What color is the bus? When was it logged out? What's the exact date it was brought in to be serviced? When was it released? Oh, it's still being serviced? Any clue as to what it is being serviced for? Oh, yeah, that's good. Thanks Marie, keep on it and report back to me if you have any further developments."

He hung up the phone, looked at his notes and then Marc. "Now that's interesting, real interesting. Come with me, now, let's go!"

Marc asked, "Where are we going?"

"To the vehicle repair garage. We can look at this bus ourselves, see if we can find any clues. It must be something major, because it's been in the garage since three days after Midnite disappeared. That's a long time for a repair."

Twenty minutes later, they arrived at the garage. They approached one of the

bays, where they could see a school bus sitting on chocks. A man appeared, wiping his hands with a rag.

"Sorry," he said, "this is police property, you can't be here."

O'Rourke laughed and playfully said, "Shut up Smitty, fuck you." Smitty looked inquisitively at him, then burst out laughing. "Fuckin' O'Rourke, my man! Where you been hiding, haven't seen your ass around here in ages."

O'Rourke decided it would be better if he didn't tell him he had retired from the force. "Oh, it sucks," he said. "They got me looking into some vehicles to see if we should fix 'em up or sell them or just junk them. This bus, over here, for example, according to my records, it's been here for what, three months or so? What's wrong with this baby?"

Smitty said, "You know, Mike, that's the funny thing. There's nothing wrong with it. Scirelli brought it in covered with mud and dust and told me to clean her up and put her in the garage. Said he'd be back for her, sometime soon."

O'Rourke and Marc glanced at each other. "Alright, thanks Smitty, I'm just gonna check her out, so I can finish up this

report." Smitty shook hands with O'Rourke, turned and went about his business.

Mike and Marc slowly walked around the bus, pointing out some dents and scratches here and there. O'Rourke wheeled over a mechanic's wheel bed and went under the bus. Marc could hear him talking to himself.

Ten minutes later he reappeared. "Well, this is interesting," he said. "There's dust, mud and grass imbedded in the frame and on the exhaust. Funny thing, it's a clay-like red mud, still damp, even after all this time. As you know, the topsoil around here is very sandy, not clay like at all."

Marc looked at him with a confused look. He asked O'Rourke if he thought the mud was from another coastal area.

"No," O'Rourke answered. "You see; the red clay is inland. Once I worked on a case in Georgia and we tracked a car's tire pattern in some hardened red clay, exactly like this. What the fuck would this bus be doing in Georgia?" he mused out loud.

Chapter VI
(The Final Plan?)

Midnite drew a deep breath. It had been three weeks since the warden had upped the ante and given him the "honor" of being in charge of his fellow inmates. At first, there had been resistance among some and jealousy among others, but for the most part, the majority of his fellow inmates either didn't care or were happy about it, for Midnite was generally well-liked, while others were just resigned to another inevitable change. Midnite enjoyed the fact that he now had more freedom, more alone time. The guards treated him differently as well, though not as an equal. All his men were busy working on their section of the road.

A big ten-point buck which had appeared on the opposite side of the road, distracted the guards, though they kept a wary eye on their prisoners. Midnite slipped into the woods and slowly gathered up his escape supplies, hoping a plan would formulate in his mind on the best way to utilize his equipment. He now had the half inch in diameter, eighteen-inch-long rubber

hose, the rag, the large soda bottle and his recently added addition of a book of matches, which one of the guards had dropped by the squad car. Midnite had to, once again move and hide his supplies, as the crew was moving down the wooded area to level it for a road going to a new development of barracks.

How many of these camps were they planning on anyway? How many innocent people's lives would be destroyed? How in God's name could this really be happening? He had a bag with medical supplies, which he carried over his shoulder. He had moved some of the medical equipment and placed his escape paraphernalia hidden under it. He knew this was dangerous, for if anyone needed any meds, they would undoubtedly go through the bag. He had to leave it on the bus most of the time so as not to raise suspicions. As the bus and its passengers slowly arrived at their next destination, Midnite made sure his crew had their next assignment and the proper tools needed for the next phase of construction. He knew they would be working this section for quite a while, probably at least two weeks and more likely three to four. The ground was very rocky;

the woods were thick with old trees, hard to cut.

He shouted out, “Going to the bathroom” and wound his way through the trees knelt down and dug a small hole. Midnite neatly placed the items in his burial ground and noted the area and exact location for his future reference, got up and returned to his lookout spot and surveyed the scene. The men on the road gang had started singing; the guards were once again drinking and smoking cigarettes and generally not paying too much attention to their surroundings. This area, as were the majority of the work areas, was very remote. This was both a plus and a minus for an escape. A-plus because if he planned right, it would afford him time to be gone before he was noticed. A-minus because he didn’t actually know where he was, or where he was going. It was a chance he had to and was willing to take.

Roger ambled up to him and asked him what the upcoming work week would entail.

Midnite asked him, “Why, what’s up?”

Roger explained that he had overheard the guards talking about another

detail of "passengers" that would be arriving in a day or two.

Midnite mulled this over. *"Would this be a good thing? Probably not. More people to contend with, more people who were probably innocent of committing crimes, more people scared shitless and for good reason."*

No, Midnite decided, this is not a good thing. He also would probably have to help indoctrinate them to the ways of their illegal community. He would decide later, after he had had time to assess the situation in its entirety, whether or not he would delay his plans. In the meantime, he decided to proceed as normal.

Aloud, he told Roger they would be cutting trees and leveling dirt to prepare for the concrete layer that was to top it off. Midnite also said that he would just have to play it by ear and wait and see what the gods brought forth. Roger nodded and ambled away. Left alone to his thoughts, Midnite realized his situation would either improve, as the new recruits would be front and center, or he would be given new responsibilities and be more visible. The warden's and the guards' attention would be focused primarily on these newbies. If a situation arose on the work detail, as the

inmates jockeyed for a new pecking order, Midnite decided he could take advantage of that and would make his move to escape. He knew he couldn't and shouldn't be subjected to anybody's greed and perversions any longer.

The next day twelve recruits got off the bus. They were scared, angry confused and unaware of what was about to befall upon them. Scirelli was the lead guard, but was not in uniform. He barked orders, rammed one of the new recruits in the stomach, who Midnite estimated to be not more than twenty-two, then turned and looked at Midnite, grinning like a hyena. Midnite immediately felt nauseous.

He returned Scirelli's stare, walked over to the new inmate, lifted him under his armpits and in a low voice said, "Don't worry, kid. We'll take care of you and keep the wolves off your ass. Keep a low profile, don't look the guards or the warden in the eyes and spread the word to your companions."

Midnite brought him to the barracks that had been prepared for the newbies and without a word walked away. He was upset and really mad. He walked up to Scirelli,

who was smoking a cigarette with his fellow guards.

"Tell me something Scirelli, exactly how small is your dick? By my estimation, it must be smaller than a fucking toothpick! Otherwise a normal fuck wouldn't always have to try to emasculate innocent people just to make themselves feel big in others' eyes, you sick fuck!"

Some of the other guards started to laugh, but caught themselves when Scirelli's face turned beat red. He started gasping for breath and then bellowed like a bull. He rushed at Midnite and started swinging his fists. Midnite sidestepped and the punches whistled past his ear. Midnite was grinning. Scirelli turned and came at him again. Midnite crouched slightly and turned to his side, creating a much smaller target.

The inmates crowded around, chanting, "Midnite, Midnite!"

The guards moved to subdue Midnite, but Scirelli waved them off saying, "No, this fucker is mine, I'm going to kill this fuckin' hippie-lovin nigger-lover! I'm going to teach him the lesson of his life and then slowly kill him, oh yes, ever so slowly."

His eyes were glazed over, insanity quite evident. His features were distorted

with rage. Some of the guards herded the newly-arrived inmates into the barracks to spare them what they assumed was going to be an ugly scene, and to keep them from getting any ideas of rebellion. Scirelli threw a roundhouse punch. Midnite leaned backwards, and like a viper, grabbed Scirelli's wrist with his right hand. He pivoted his left foot forward and with his left hand slammed his palm into Scirelli's elbow. It cracked like a tree limb as the arm dangled from his shoulder, useless. Now completely berserk, he charged Midnite yet again, swinging his good arm and fist repeatedly as Midnite kept side stepping his awkward advances.

Suddenly Midnite stopped and said, "Last chance, Scirelli, stop now and I won't hurt you anymore."

Scirelli screamed and charged again. Midnite waited for him to get in range, threw a perfect sidekick to Scirelli's left knee, and cracked the kneecap. Scirelli fell to the ground like a mortally wounded deer, screaming incoherently. Midnite looked up and around at the crowd. Everyone was motionless, not knowing what to do. No one had ever talked back to a guard before, and never ever, had anyone fought a cop or hurt him. As Midnite continued his surveillance,

he noticed the warden looking at him and then at the fallen officer. The guards were torn between looking at the warden, waiting for an order or signal, and looking at Scirelli moaning on the ground. Finally, the warden barged through the crowd, shoving anyone in his way.

Ponting down at Scirelli, he barked out, “Take him to the infirmary. You, follow me!” he shouted at Midnite.

Midnite did as he was told and followed silently a few paces behind the warden. Midnite noticed that two guards were flanking him. As they neared the warden’s building, the warden stopped, turned to face Midnite and motioned the guards to step back, out of earshot.

He leaned forward and whispered in Midnite’s ear, “You son ‘a-bitch! You make things very hard for me! In front of everybody! This won’t be pleasant. I have to fuck you up, and I’ll have to do it in front of everybody. You fuckin’ got that, you fuckin’ son ‘a-bitch?”

The warden motioned to one of the guards. He came over with a large wooden bat. By now, the inmates had gathered around the warden and Midnite. Midnite turned to look at the gathering, when suddenly he felt a shooting pain go through

his left thigh, then his stomach, right arm, left arm and right shin. Through the pain, Midnite realized something. Although he was being hit and hit hard, the warden wasn't hitting any areas that would break his bones or cause long term severe bodily harm. But it still hurt like hell. Midnite dropped as the warden was shouting to his audience.

"This is his and your first and last warning. Anybody who even thinks about hitting another officer of mine will be beaten to a pulp. Hang him upside down and get him out of here now, I said fucking now!"

The warden threw the bat back to the guard, turned and stormed off. Three of the guards picked up Midnite's bloody body and dragged him to the sweatbox, opened the door and threw him in. They didn't hang him up, however, but left him limp on the floor. Midnite rose to his elbows and slowly accustomed his eyes to the now familiar darkness. He had a different feeling, a more serene and composed feeling than he had the last time he was in the box. He was trying to understand why. It wasn't only the fact that the warden hadn't really hurt him too badly, or the fact that they hadn't chained him or hoisted him upside down this time. It was that the warden wasn't truly angry. He had

merely gone through the motions of beating Midnite, mostly because they were in public.

"I wonder why he had reacted that way," Midnite mused. Midnite had surely beaten and hurt Scirelli, in front of the entire compound that consisted of not only the inmates but the guards as well.

"What was the true end game?" he thought to himself, *"and how am I to be involved……?"*

Marc was, once again, in O'Rourke's office. "What do you mean?" Marc asked. "The bus went where?"

O'Rourke said, "Well, remember Smitty, the guy at the garage?" Marc nodded. "Well," O'Rourke continued, "he called me yesterday and told me the bus had been taken out of storage, or repairs, or whatever they called it. Smitty said that one of the guards complained about the long ride into Georgia and transporting the civilian inmates was a real pain in the ass because they, the guards, would be away from home for two or three days. I then asked Smitty if he knew where in Georgia they had gone. He said no, not exactly, but he had logged the miles, because they had told him that upon returning they wanted him to "do the same thing" as before. Moreover, check this

out; the bus logged over eight hundred miles. What the fuck is going on? In addition, I got the name of the officer that brought the bus back into the shop. I'm going to be talking to him in about, um, forty-five minutes. Call me in the office in two hours and I'll let you know what was said."

Marc got up, put his hands on the desk between himself and O'Rourke and said, "This isn't looking good, is it?"

O'Rourke said 'Go! There's no sense in speculating. Call me later."

Midnite lay in the darkness. He figured it had been about two and a half days since he had been thrown into the sweatbox. No food, no water. Nothing but his thoughts. Again, he spent much of his time evaluating and reevaluating his life. Not too distant memories surfaced. He, once again, flashed back to when he left Chris and his apartment and his life up to that point in time. Midnite went outside, blinked and looked up at the sky. It was a clear, crisp day. He put down his guitars, took out his sunglasses and put them on. *"Hum, my last chance for a rose- colored world,"* he mused.

Slowly he made his way to his bank. He was in no particular hurry. He was feeling the weight of his decision.

"Fuck it! I'm just gonna do it. I'm gonna register in college, play the game for a while, then hit the road."

At the bank, Midnite closed out his accounts and counted his money. He had a grand total of $9524.76. Most of the money he had earned from his gigs, over the last year, or so.

"Well, this will hold me till I get some more gigs," he thought. *"At least I won't starve."*

Midnite left the bank and decided to get something to eat and finalize his plans. He walked a few blocks and turned left into the Village area of Manhattan. He found his favorite kosher deli and talked to his friends behind the counter. He kept things light, being personable and joking with them. He knew he would miss them, the deli, the Village and the way of life in New York City. There was nowhere else in the world like The Big Apple. Life here was rare, indeed! Midnite ordered pastrami on rye, with spicy mustard and a pickle to go.

As he was crossing the street, he became aware of someone calling his name. "Midnite! Midnite, wait up!" Midnite

recognized the voice, of course. He turned and waited for Kathy to catch up to him. He looked appraisingly at her. She was an imposing figure, almost six feet tall, beautiful, with classic but unique looks. She had very stunning exotic features, which often elicited envy and awe when both men and women viewed her as they passed her on the streets.

"Hey, beautiful," Midnite said, "What's happening, where you off to?"

"What the fuck do you mean, what's happening? I have to find out from Chris that you're leaving New York and you don't even tell me? You're a real fucker, god damn it!"

Kathy was furious. She ran up to Midnite and swung as hard as she could at him. Midnite coolly ducked to his left and the slap whistled by his face. She then swung again. This time Midnite blocked the punch with his right forearm and quickly slid his hand down to her wrist. He then grabbed her and pulled her long body into his.

"Listen, I wouldn't have skipped town without seeing you first."

Kathy stared at him and said, "Oh, you mean you would have deemed me worthy of a good bye? When, exactly, were

you going to discuss this trip with me, *When* you were already at your *destination*? C'mon Midnite don't I mean more to you than that?" Kathy was crying.

Midnite was empathetic, feeling dishonest, not knowing exactly how to handle the situation. He said, "Of course you do. I left the apartment, but I'm going to be in New York for two more days, I was going to call you before I left, to let you know what's going on. Don't be so paranoid, ok? I was……."

Midnite was cut short as Kathy screamed, "You're missing the fucking point! You tell me you're leaving when you're leaving? What is wrong with that picture? Riddle me that, oh psychic one!"

Midnite had had enough, hmm, double entendres, "Listen, it's 11:30, I'll meet you at our spot at 5:00. Does that fit into your agenda?" he almost shyly asked.

"I ain't happy, but I'll be there," she replied. Kathy gave him a peck on his cheek, smartly spun around and stormed off.

"Damn, she's right," he thought, "I've been so wrapped up in myself I haven't been giving anyone else priority. What am I gonna tell her tonight? Well, right now I've got to find Ramirez!" He walked the ten or so blocks to his friend's

house and knocked on the door. A tall, jaundiced man of about thirty-five answered the door.

"Hey, bro', what's up? Que pasa, hombre?"

Ramirez was happy to see his friend. Theirs was a deep spiritual friendship. When they saw each other, they just filled in the sketches of their own tapestries of life.

An hour and a half later Midnite said, "I'm gonna trade these axes in and bring my new ones here. Can I stash my guitars here for about a day and a half? Is that cool?"

Ramirez nodded and said, "Cool! Yo, man I don't care if you keep your shit here forever, you know?"

"Thanks, man, I really appreciate it. Here's a coupla bucks to help you out," Midnite said.

"Shit, why you gonna do something like that?" Ramirez asked. He was insulted. Midnite reacted quickly, not wanting to cause his sensitive friend pain or misunderstanding.

"Listen, Carlos, I'm leaving for Colorado in two days and I'm not sure what's gonna happen or where I'll end up. I have plans, serious plans. I'm gonna be going to school at the University of

Colorado. Use that as my home base, half way to either coast. I've known you for a long time and consider you my best friend. We've partied, played mucho music together and you've helped me grow as a musician. You've helped me to understand women and I love and respect you for who you are. This money is to thank you for some of those years!"

Ramirez, with tears in his eyes, pulled his friend to his bosom and wrapped his arms around Midnite's back. He whispered in Midnite's ear, "I love you man! Vaya con Dios, May God be with you."

Midnite said, "I'll be back in a few hours."

They hugged and Midnite left. He went across town to Manny's Music and to Sam Ash, two well-known and respected instrument outlets. He tried out and experimented with quite a few guitars. Settling on Sam Ash's selections, he bargained and negotiated the best deal for trading in his own well used but excellent and well cared for guitars. Two hours later, he walked out with a Les Paul and a Fender Stratocaster. He was in heaven! Midnite walked back across town and dropped off his guitars at Ramirez's house. Midnite

looked at his watch and realized he had to hightail it over to "their spot" to see Kathy. "Their spot" was actually Bryant Park, where they had first met.

"Shit," he thought. *"What the fuck am I gonna tell her? Sorry babes, but I really haven't thought about you for the last coupla days?"*

Midnite was hot, angry, thirsty and hungry. Very hungry. He came back to the present quickly, quite aware of his predicament. He realized why he was brought back to the here and now so quickly when he heard voices drawing nearer to the sweatbox. He heard the rattling of the lock, and as the door was thrown open, was blinded by the sudden daylight. He put his hands over his eyes and tried to adjust to the glare. He stood up apprehensively, not knowing what to expect. One of the guards gently took hold of his arm and helped him to stand.

In a soft voice he said, "Come on, go take a shower, get something to eat and then come see the warden. You're invited to his office," he said incredulously.

Midnite knew there were going to be changes; he just didn't know what they would be. He did as the guard had requested.

After his shower, a long drink of water and a quick bite to eat, he approached the warden's office, feeling nauseous. He knocked and entered. The warden was alone.

He looked at Midnite and said, "You know you fucked up, big time. I had to juggle a lot of things to keep you from dying. You owe me. You will make it up to me."

The warden was very serious and Midnite wondered where this was going. He knew it wasn't going to a good place, so he asked "Yeah, I figured something like this was in the making. What, exactly are you planning on doing, sir?"

The warden glanced sideways at Midnite and smiled. "Well, boy," he said "come with me and you shall see."

As they left the warden's office and went down the stairs, four guards flanked them. They all walked silently, past the pond, into the woods and in a different direction than when they had had their previous "meeting" in the woods. They walked northwest for about a mile further than they had hiked to their previous spot, until they arrived at a clearing. Midnite gasped. There were eight barracks evenly spaced, with a pond in the middle and three other buildings. All the inhabitants that

Midnite could see were women from their teens into their thirties. Most were quite beautiful. None looked happy.

The warden and his entourage walked towards the three buildings. Then motioned for Midnite to follow him into the first building. Inside was a lavish, beautifully furnished living room/bedroom set up, complete with a wet bar, bathroom, refrigerator and a huge selection of wines.

The warden didn't say anything as he walked out of the first building and into the second, followed by Midnite and the guards. This interior had simply furnished barracks, set up like a house, with twelve separate bedrooms, and one communal kitchen and bathroom. The inhabitants were four male and six female uniformed guards.

Leaving the second building, they walked to and entered the third building. The set up was quite different from the other two buildings. The entrance was dark; the one large room looked similar to a high-class restaurant, complete with a Maître D. Midnite exited the building and quickly assessed his surroundings, realizing, in essence, that he was in a high class and illegal brothel or alternatively, he thought, in actuality a high-end flesh peddling operation. He made a bet with himself that

these unfortunate women were pretty much in the same situation he was, with various stories of how they were now in this fancy hellhole.

Midnite turned as the warden tapped him on the shoulder, “So what do you think?”

Midnite answered by asking a question. “Why am I here?”

The warden, as he was wont to do, waved the guards away dismissively. “You, my good fellow, are going to oversee and run this place for me. The last fellow we had came to an unfortunate end, because he had his own visions of grandeur. He started his own operation on the side. Of course, I found out about it. The rest, as they say, is history. Also, I want and need to get you away from the labor camp. Scirelli wants to kill you, so this will keep some distance between you two.”

“Why me?” Midnite asked.

“Ah, yes, of course, why you? Well, you’re different. Smart, fearless and with a strong will. You’re someone who can be innovative. Can I trust you? No! However, I’ll have security measures in place. In addition, I will entice you with comps that will be hard to resist and will make your job much more interesting.”

Midnite's mind was racing. *"What if I accept this position? I'll have more freedom, it'll give me more free time,* ***maybe****, to plan my escape."*

Aloud he said, "Questions: Who will take over my work crew, especially the newbies? Where will my new quarters be? What will I have to do? What will you expect from me?"

The warden looked Midnite directly in his eyes and said, "Well, boy, don't you worry any about your responsibilities with the work gang. Now you will be responsible for setting up the meetings between our clients and the ladies. You will be responsible for making sure the girls see the doctor, who comes around once a week, to make sure they're clean. No std's, no pregnancies, you get it? In addition, you have to make sure there is always food and drink in the restaurant. Some of the guards have responsibilities too. They'll show you the ropes. They know to treat you with respect, not as an inmate. If you prove yourself to me, you and I will both benefit, you got it? As far as your quarters, find your own way. You can stay in the guard's housing, find a woman to shack up with; it ain't no never mind to me."

Midnite smiled and nodded his head affirmatively. “Okay,” he said,” I want to explore my new digs. I want to talk to the guards and to the women. That cool with you?”

The warden looked pleased, “I like your attitude, boy. You go “do your thing” as you hippies like to say.”

Suddenly his persona changed, he was no longer smiling, and he whispered so only Midnite could hear him, “Let me tell you just one thing, boy. You do like you was supposed to do, everything will be honkey-dory. You fuck me over in any way, you will be a dead fuckin’ nigger-lovin’ hippie, you comprende me?”

Just as suddenly as the warden had changed persona(s), he turned back to the “other” warden. “But I like you, that’s why you’re here now and not buried in the swamp somewhere. I’ll expect a report in two days.”

He turned and left with two of the guards. The other two stayed near Midnite, watching, just watching. Midnite glanced back at them and walked off, towards the second building he had inspected. The guards were still inside, drinking beer, talking and smoking cigarettes. A television was on, although nobody was watching it

and music was playing loudly. The chatter suddenly stopped as Midnite entered the room.

He glanced around and said, “Please turn down the music. Let’s talk.”

No one moved. Midnite calmly walked over to the stereo on the opposite side of the room, switched off the radio and turned around. “Listen,” he said. “I know this is awkward for everyone here. You don’t know what to expect from me and I sure as shit don’t know anything about any of you. A few days, or hours ago, we would have been on opposite sides of this equation. Now we’re all playing on the same team. So, you can make my life a living hell or we can all help each other to make a smooth transition.”

He walked over to the guard he had assessed as being the leader of this group. He held out his hand and said, “Hello, my name is Midnite.”

“We know who the fuck you are!” the leader barked out. “And we don’t like this shit at all. I mean who the fuck are you, anyway?”

“So,” Midnite responded, “you know who the fuck I am, but you’re wondering who the fuck I am, too?”

There was a ripple of laughter throughout the group. As the leader looked around, the laughter stopped.

Midnite continued, “C’mon man, give me a break. Do you think I had any choice in any of this? I’m like you, in the sense that we’re all at the whim of the warden”

Now there was a murmuring of agreement. The man Midnite was addressing looked up, then stood up and slowly extended his arm and shook Midnite’s stretched out hand

“They call me Jimbo,” he said and then sat back down.

“Well, Jimbo,” Midnite said with a smile. “It is a pleasure to meet you.”

Slowly the crowd warmed up. Midnite was now in his element. He asked questions about how the place was run, who the customers were, how this place even existed. He had a million questions. He was naturally curious and needed to know everything. He also had ulterior motives, so he could gather as much intelligence needed to further his own agenda. Now that the social footing had equalized somewhat, and though Midnite realized what a tenuous and fragile situation he was in, he felt more

comfortable. He stopped reflecting and said, “Hey, can I get one of those beers?”

Someone said, “Sure, I’ll get one for ya, hold on a minute.”

As Midnite acknowledged the speaker, he saw a guitar out of the corner of his eye. It was leaning against the wall; behind the open door he had entered from. As the woman guard brought him his beer, Midnite said, “Why thank you. And your name is?”

The guard blushed and said, “You’re welcome. My name is Eleanor.”

Midnite nodded to her and asked, “Whose guitar is that over there?”

One of the guards, who had been sitting in the background said, “It’s mine, why? You play?”

Midnite answered, “Well, a little. Mind if I strum it a bit? It’s been awhile, know what I mean?”

“Yeah, I hear ya,” he replied.

Midnite put down his beer and picked up the guitar from behind the door. He sat down and strummed the strings. He quickly tuned the guitar, closed his eyes and started playing. Jimbo and all the others kept glancing at each other, nodding and smiling.

Midnite was now into a slow bluesy song he had written in his mind, while

hanging upside down in the sweatbox. His lyrics told of the life at these internment camps. His emotion and the truth that poured out from his being, brought not only the guards to tears, but also some of the women who had gathered outside building Two. Midnite came to the end of the song, looked up and glanced around. He saw people crying and holding each other. “Oh, I am sorry, I didn’t mean to ruin anyone’s day.”

“No man, you don’t understand,” Eleanor said “We ain’t never heard anything that beautiful, at least not live and in person. You spoke the truth; shit here sucks and we’re all a part of it. We’re all forced to do this, whether we’re an “inmate” or a guard. We know most people here didn’t do nothin’ wrong. We ain’t got no choice in the matter, though.”

Midnite acknowledged what she said, then put down the guitar and went outside. He addressed the women that stood outside. There were now quite a few.

“Hello, I’m Midnite and I’m supposed to run this place. I need you all to help me out, so we can all make the best of an unfortunate and fucked up situation.”

Midnite glanced around and noticed that the two guards who had stayed behind,

after the warden had left, were no longer in sight.

Turning his attention back to the women, he asked, “Do you have any questions, or is there anything you want to tell me?”

One by one, the women introduced themselves and told him their stories of lament or tried to find out about him. Midnite turned and looked inside the barracks, then back towards the women.

“So,” he asked, “Do you all get along pretty well, or is life a living hell?”

One woman, who had introduced herself as Lone Star, said, “Yeah, all in all, we get along pretty well. It’s much different from your camp, probably because the warden doesn’t come here often and it is women here, not men, that need to do hard labor. I mean we fake it when there are visitors, so outsiders can’t tell we get along.”

“Ah, I understand,” Midnite said. “So, let’s get down to business. Show me the ropes and tell me how you all manage to stay so upbeat. The atmosphere here impresses me. Please tell me exactly how you make this madness work. Tell me how to fake it when the warden, guards or

visitors come. Tell me exactly what happens when visitors come. You get the picture."

Marc looked at his watch. It was time to call O'Rourke. He glanced over at Deanna and said, "Keep your fingers crossed. Let's hope that we're finally getting somewhere."

"Don't worry," Deanna replied, "my fingers, toes and anything else I can think of are crossed. Oh my god, you don't know how much I miss him!"

She was crying and sobbing softly. Marc put down the phone and walked over to Deanna. Without a word, he put his arms around her and hugged her tightly. Deanna's crying subsided and Marc walked over to the phone, picked it up and dialed O'Rourke's number. Mike answered on the second ring. "Marc," O'Rourke asked, "That you?"

"Yeah, man, it's me," Marc responded. "Anything new, what'd you find out?"

There was silence on the other end. Then O'Rourke said, "Well, I talked to the officer who drove the bus, an Officer O'Reilly, so we had that Irish connection, if you know what I mean."

"Yeah, yeah, I got it!" Marc exclaimed. "Fuckin' tell me already! What happened?"

O'Rourke continued, 'It seems as though your buddy cop, that Sgt. Scirelli, the one that fucked you up, is involved and maybe even an organizer of what's going on."

Marc listened intently and remained silent. O'Rourke was looking at his notes. "O'Reilly told me there is a secret compound where they have inmates that aren't really inmates constructing roads, building houses, gardening and whatever else the powers that be need or want done."

Marc was silent, listening in disbelief. O'Rourke was shuffling papers, stalling. He rather awkwardly continued, "He remembers Midnite being transported, along with some other guys when he was driving. He said they were in pretty bad shape, but that they would probably have survived their beatings."

"Shit, man, where is this place, this doesn't sound good, not at all!" Marc exclaimed.

"Well," O'Rourke answered, "There's the rub. When they got what was to be two hours from their destination they had O'Reilly pull over at a gas station, but when

he got back on to drive, they put a bag over his head and someone else drove to the compound. They did the same thing, in reverse, when they left the next day."

"So!" Marc exclaimed, "we don't know where this fucking place is?"

"No, not exactly," O'Rourke responded, "But we're within two hours or so of where it is. That narrows it down considerably from just knowing it's about eight hours from here. O'Reilly drew a map for me and gave me some landmarks. He said he originally went along with it because he really thought they were transporting inmates. When he got to the compound and talked to some of the other guards, he realized this wasn't a normal or ethical situation. Said he's been having nightmares, but didn't know who he could trust. Anyway, knowing it's further into Georgia, I drew an arc radius and highlighted the most remote areas. I would take an educated guess that we will find the compound within one of three areas. With that said, I think we should go for a ride."

Marc simply asked, "When?"

O'Rourke responded with, "Let's not waste any time. We go tomorrow."

Midnite had decided that for the time being, he would bunk with the guards. He had various reasons for this decision. The primary one was intelligence gathering. They had a lot of free time on their hands and they were usually bored. Therefore, they talked about life at the camp and all it entailed. His secondary reason was that he did not want the women to feel awkward, having a stranger staying in their quarters.

Lone Star worked with Midnite. She showed him "the ropes." Midnite was impressed with the atmosphere and efficiency of the operation. Visitors came on a regularly-scheduled timeframe. Most of them arrived once every two weeks. They had their favorite girls, and for the most part, consistently stayed with them. The doctor came once a week unless there was an emergency. Emergencies were usually the result of a girl being knocked around by a drunk or angry patron. Midnite asked how the patrons were scheduled and how there was communication with the outside world. He was told that he would have to start writing on a certain color paper, a different color for each client, notifying him or her the time and date of each appointment. He then simply gave the papers to Jimbo. Over the next few days, Midnite had grasped the

essentials of running the place. He knew, in reality, he was just a conduit. He ran nothing, but kept the warden and his associates “clean” They were never directly involved with the goings on of this camp.

Midnite was surprised by the names he wrote the appointments for. Eleanor and Lone Star told him their positions and social status. There were state senators, congressional representatives, mayors, police chiefs and corporate heads. The list was, however, confined to about thirty-five patrons, who, he was informed, changed periodically.

One day, as Midnite was organizing his list of patrons and their respective schedules, he happened to glance down at the molding of the office floor. He saw a wire tucked behind the molding and followed its path with his eyes. He saw that it went through the wall and into a rarely used closet. Glancing around, Midnite verified that he was alone. He walked towards the closet, opened the door and followed the wire, which was cleverly hidden behind the molding and into a conduit pipe. It appeared to dead end behind an unused bookcase. Midnite reached behind the bookcase. There was a cut out in the wall. Midnite’s excitement grew. About a

foot and a half inside the cutout, he felt a telephone.

"No way", he murmured to himself. Midnite quickly ran to the front door. He closed the door and carefully latched it. He ran back to the closet and closed that door as well. Reaching into the crevice, he pulled the phone out. Midnite's heart was racing and he was sweating. He picked up the receiver. There was a dial tone! He quickly dialed his number at the rented house, praying. It rang and rang. Nobody answered. He had started to dial his parents' home phone when he heard voices approaching. He quickly replaced the phone behind the bookcase, ran over to the entrance door and unlatched it. He was just sitting back down when the warden entered the room. He carefully looked around the room, walked over to Midnite and playfully slapped him on the back.

Without preamble he said, "My man! I've been hearing nothing but good things about you. Everyone seems to like you. Jimbo and his people, the girls, they really like you and, most importantly, our clientele. They all said you're smart, friendly and very efficient. To show my appreciation, I'm giving you the weekend

off and you're going on a little expedition with me. You're going to town tomorrow."

With that, he turned around and walked out.

Midnite quickly got up and ran to the doorway. "Wait, sir," he cried out, "what do you mean to town? What town, why are we going and what will we do there?"

The warden spun around facing Midnite, "Don't you worry none about any of that. Now you just sit your efficient ass down and continue what you was doing before I got here."

Midnite returned to his desk but could not concentrate. He wondered what was going to happen now. *"Time will tell,"* he surmised. *"I'll have to just sit back and wait, there is no choice, I guess."*

The remainder of the day dragged by for Midnite. He felt as though he were in a state of limbo. Finally, the day was through and he managed to fall asleep, although very fitfully. He woke up just as the sun was coming up. Quietly he made some breakfast, ate his egg sandwich and was cleaning up when one of the guards from the Warden's camp appeared in the doorway. He motioned for Midnite to come with him. Midnite glanced at him and nodded, but continued to

wash his dishes. The guard barked out the command, “Now!”

Midnite finished drying his dishes and slowly walked over to the guard and out the door. They drove to the warden’s camp in an old army jeep. Neither one talked during the ten-minute drive through the woods. Midnite was dropped off in front of the warden’s office. No sooner had he alighted from the jeep when the warden came down the steps, nodded to Midnite and said, “Come on, let’s go.”

Midnite followed him into a waiting Cadillac limousine. The chauffeur was a guard from the compound and there were two more inside. “Now can I ask you what’s going on?” Midnite nervously asked.

“Sure, you can ask,” the warden laughed, “but I ain’t gonna tell you nothing.”

Midnite replied, “Come on, man. How about a clue?”

“Well,” the warden replied, “I will tell you it’s nothing bad for you. Actually you’re gonna love it.”

The guards exchanged glances and smirked at each other. An hour and a half later, they pulled up in front of a rustic restaurant. The sign in front simply said “Home Cooking”. Midnite was perplexed.

There had been no street signs, no directional signs, nothing to identify the route they had traveled, nor the town they had just entered.

Inside the restaurant were two men dressed in suits. They turned and nodded to the warden. The warden told Midnite and the guards to have a seat at a table in the back of the dining area. They complied. Meanwhile, the warden sat with the two men. Midnite could hear them quietly talking, although he couldn't make out what they were saying. Occasionally they turned toward Midnite, then conferred with each other. One of the men seemed to get agitated. The warden and the third man quieted him down.

Finally, after what seemed like hours, the warden called Midnite over to their table. "Sit down," he said. "These gentlemen have a proposal for you."

No greetings or names were exchanged. Midnite waited. Finally, the calmer of the two spoke. "We have seen your reports, from Camp II and from the work on the road gang. For the first time in our history, they have both turned a profit. Everybody seems to like you; the inmates, the guards, the girls and even the warden here and he don't like nobody. We have

some other, ah, ventures, shall we say, and we might be interested in letting you get involved with some of them."

Midnite looked at the warden, then Mr. Agitated and "the calm guy", scrutinizing each one carefully. He did not like what he saw. Little beady eyes, arrogant dispositions and condescension dripped from their pores.

He said, "Well that's certainly vague enough. Maybe you all could elaborate some?"

The agitated man slammed his hands on the table and shouted at Midnite, "Listen here, boy, nobody, but nobody speaks to me, to us that way, you hear!"

Midnite calmly responded, "How the fuck can I not hear you? I'll ask you again, what do you have in mind?"

Midnite glanced at the warden, who was smirking and shaking his head. Mr. Agitated was ready to blow a gasket.

He stood up and said, "Gentlemen, not you hippie, I'm leaving. I suggest you throw this hot piece of shit in that fuckin' sweatbox of yours. When he's ready to kiss my ass, we'll talk again."

He shook hands with the warden and the calm man and stormed out, without even a glance at Midnite.

"Well, that went well!" Midnite said. The warden and Mr. Calm looked at each other and neither one looked happy.

"You just fucked yourself, I think," Mr. Calm said. "That was a very influential and highly regarded gentleman who just happens to be a senator."

Midnite's mind was racing. *"This shit must go all the way to the very core of the government."*

Then aloud he said, "So, what does that mean for me?"

The warden explained that he would have to take Midnite away from Camp II as punishment and put him back on the road gang for a while.

Midnite just said, "Fuck!"

"And," the warden continued, "I'll probably have to put you in the sweatbox for a day or two, so as the senator's spies will file a good report. You don't want him any madder than he is now. You just can't keep your fuckin' mouth shut, huh, boy!"

The warden pushed himself away from the table and stood up. He and Mr. Calm shook hands, whispered in each other's ears and went out separate doors. The guards flanked Midnite and they all went back into the limousine. The guards and the warden were bantering back and

forth, but Midnite's mind was elsewhere. He was formulating a plan of escape. He became aware of someone shaking his shoulder. "Hey boy, don't you hear the warden talkin' to ya?" the guard on his left was shouting.

"Huh, uh no, I didn't", Midnite responded honestly.

"That's alright, boys. He's had a rough day. What I was saying boy, was that I want you to tidy up any loose ends at Camp II and then report to me. You will then go on road crew duty to assess that situation, give me a status report and then we'll put you in the sweatbox for a day or two. When you get out of there…… oh, and we'll sneak in some water and food for ya, we'll have that meeting again and this time you'll be eager to hear what the gentlemen have to say, right, boy?"

Midnite thought to himself that everybody was fuckin' insane. He responded in the affirmative to the warden, by nodding his head. Thankfully, he fell asleep for the remainder of the trip back to the campsite.

Marc and O'Rourke were six hours into their road trip. They pulled over at a service station to gas up, get some food and drink and ask some questions. After

ordering burgers and fries, iced tea and some candy, they went up to the register. O'Rourke flashed his badge and amiably asked the attendant if she knew of a camp for prisoners. At first, she was wary and asked why they were interested.

O'Rourke laughed and said, "Well, I feel kind of stupid. My friend wanted me to drop off some official papers there, so we drove all the way up to meet him. Problem is, I'm a dumb ass. The paper I wrote the directions on flew out the car window about thirty miles back. This was as far as I could remember. After this, I have no clue."

"Uh, okay, I gotcha," she said. "Sometimes the buses come here to gas up and stuff. All's I know is that they complain to me that they are going to the middle of nowhere and still have about two hours to go. They never stay long and they never look happy. It's kinda weird, actually."

"Well thanks, I appreciate it, You've been very helpful", O'Rourke said. They paid for their items and casually strolled out the door.

"Damn, that was good and bad," Marc said.

"How so?" O'Rourke asked.

"Well, we know we're on the right path, but who the fuck knows where we're going and what we will find?"

"I know, I know, O'Rourke gasped, this sucks. I think we'll have to return home. I'll do some more digging, you know, get some more information somehow. We'll be better prepared next time. We'll have to find a hotel somewhere around here and plan on being away at least two or three days. I'm debating if I should go back in there and give her my business card."

Marc hastily said, "Not a good idea, Mike. If someone knows we're nosing around and somehow they find out you left a card, they'll know who to come after."

"Good point, that's why I brought you," O'Rourke said as he jabbed Marc playfully in the ribs. "Come on, let's go."

Midnite knew it was time. His journey here had to end. He went through the motions of compiling his report for the warden. He gathered up his meager belongings, went to his friends and told them he would look forward to seeing them again. He especially would miss Lone Star, who had helped him learn to run the camp efficiently.

He gave his report to one of the guards, with instructions to give it to the warden, then shook hands and simply said, "Hang in there, man."

The guard nodded and quietly said, "You too."

One of the guards from the road gang camp waited for him. Finally, he said, "Come on Midnite, we gotta get going."

Midnite jumped into the jeep and said, "Let's go, before we all start crying." Midnite wondered why he was sad. On the one hand, he would be leaving relative comfort and going back to hell. He realized, however, he was sad because he would be leaving some friends. People, for the most part, in the same predicament and circumstances as himself. When they arrived at his barracks, their faces were somber. No one knew what to say to Midnite or how to act in front of him.

"Good to have you back," and "Sorry, man," were some of the platitudes he heard. He acknowledged everyone, feeling as though he had seen them yesterday, not months ago. Roger ambled through the doorway and ran over to Midnite and hugged him, hard, then took Midnite by the arm and dragged him outside.

"Don't want nobody to hear us," he said. "Bad shit's about to come down. Just listen to me, nod your head and laugh, so nobody thinks anything's out of the ordinary."

Roger laughed aloud, then quietly said, "Scirelli's got it in for you. I heard him and that rat he hangs out with talking to some of our people."

Midnite slapped his knee and laughed, loud.

"They are gonna make you have an accident the day after tomorrow, when the warden has to go away for a day. You're supposed to be in the sweatbox then and they're either going to light a fire or hang you with the chain and say that you hanged yourself because you couldn't take it anymore."

Midnite and Roger hugged. Midnite whispered, "Thanks man, I owe you, I'll never forget this." Roger was crying, but nodded and walked away.

Midnite was going through his belongings when an eerie feeling came over him. He looked towards the door and saw Scirelli leaning against the frame. He was drunk and leering at Midnite. He smiled and took a drunken step forward, sliding his

middle finger across his throat, then pointed at Midnite and shook his head up and down.

Midnite knew exactly what he meant. Scirelli turned around to leave and fell down. Joey D the "Rat" came out of the shadows and picked his mentor up out of the dirt. Midnite ran over and slammed the door shut.

The next morning, two guards came into the barracks unannounced and told Midnite to wake up, get dressed and follow them.

The larger of the two said, "No breakfast and the warden wants you to assess the current situation and progress with the road construction, then he wants your report handed in before we put you in the box tonight."

Midnite's mind was racing. He knew the time would have to be perfect. He needed a distraction; he needed pandemonium and utter confusion. It had to be today. He was driven to the site by the guards, not being allowed on the bus. They didn't want him communicating with the other inmates, so he couldn't reveal anything about Camp II and the women there. Midnite was happy to see the crew was still in the same general vicinity as

when he had left the project some months ago. This surprised him. He inquired to one of the guards as to the reason for this. He told Midnite it was because they had taken the crew and put them to work building a garage for one of the Senators, but now they had to resume work because of pressure from the governor's office.

"Perfect," Midnite thought. *"All I have to do is find where I hid my escape items."*

He looked around and saw, for the most part, everything was routine. The guards were keeping an eye on things, but they were also drinking, laughing and talking. The inmates were cutting down trees and leveling the road. Midnite went up to one of the guards, Robert Kaminski, who was sitting in his car and asked him if he had pen and paper. When the guard asked him why he needed them, Midnite replied that he had to write a current report for the warden. Just as the guard was handing the pen and pad to Midnite, Scirelli, who had silently hobbled up on his broken leg, snuck up behind Midnite and pushed him, hard, into the car. He told the guard to get out of the car and to "get lost."

Scirelli then said, "Listen, you little fuck. You're a dead man. So live in fear.

You won't know when and you won't know where. So have fun while you're still alive."

Scirelli got in the guard's car, rolled up the window and turned on the air conditioner and radio. Midnite knocked on the window and motioned for Scirelli to roll down the window. As Scirelli complied, more out of curiosity than because he was requested to do so, Midnite smiled and said "Scirelli, you're an ignorant fuck. It may just work out that you won't be able to harm me in any way."

"Oh yeah," Scirelli screamed, over the loud music, how do you figure that?"

"Because you won't be alive to do it!" Midnite said, as he walked away and immediately went over to Kaminski. "Piece of work there," Midnite said, hooking his thumb towards Scirelli. The guard smiled and shook his head in agreement.

Midnite continued, "I gotta take a leak, be right back." The guard nodded towards the woods and simply said "Ok."

O'Rourke was excited. He immediately called Marc at Midnite's rental cottage. Deanna answered the phone. Mike said, "I'm not trying to be impolite, Deanna, but I have to speak with Marc immediately."

Deanna, taken somewhat aback, said, “Sorry Mr. O’Rourke, Marc’s not here. He’s out running some errands. Tell me what’s up and I’ll be sure to relay the information as soon as he returns.”

Mike O’Rourke took a moment. He really didn’t know Deanna. Most of his dealings had been with Marc. Then he relaxed. He knew Marc trusted her and this person, Midnite, who this whole thing was about, trusted her; it was good enough for him.

“Deanna, listen very carefully. Here’s what I’ve uncovered. There’s a work farm in Georgia, where they’ve been taking transient people who come to visit this area.”

“Yes, yes, I know all that,” Deanna said impatiently.

“Ok,” Mike continued, “Sorry. Anyway, tell Marc that I think, if we spend another day or two on the road, we’ll be able to find this place. I hung out with some cops, got them drunk and boy, did they talk! One of my old buddies was tellin’ us that he couldn’t stand knowing of this place and not being able to tell anybody about it. He said there were many innocent people that were being kidnapped and forced to work at these places. He was crying and said he was

thinking about going to see the top cops, the brass, but he was aware that they could be involved as well. He said he was ready to go to the newspapers. I'm supposed to meet him tomorrow. I'll call you guys after our meeting."

"Wow!" exclaimed Deanna," that's pretty heavy and scary. Good luck tomorrow and let us know something as soon as you can. I'll explain everything to Marc when he gets home." O'Rourke hung up.

Midnite walked casually into the woods. As soon as he was out of sight he scrambled and started looking around the area where he thought he had buried his "escape items." Finally, he located them and stuffed them into his pants and crotch. He was casually walking out of the woods when he stopped short. He saw one of the guards filling up an excavator with gasoline. He spotted an empty coke bottle lying on the ground He heard the guard being called by one of the inmates. He saw the guard put down the gas can and quickly run towards an inmate, cursing. An inmate was trapped under a tractor that had slid sideways in a ditch. All the guards ran to help the trapped man. All the guards, that is, except Scirelli, who remained in the air-conditioned car

with the music blasting. This was all transpiring in slow motion. Midnite glanced to his right, then to his left. Everybody was gone.

"This is it!" Midnite thought. With shaking hands and a racing heart, he ran over to the gas can, took out his "escape rag" and stuffed it into the spout of the can of gasoline. Then he turned the can upside down a few times to saturate the rag. He threw away his hose and bottle, in opposite directions, into the woods. Crawling on his belly he went to the rear of the car Scirelli was in. He carefully placed the can of gasoline directly under the gas tank of the car. He took out the book of matches. He lit one match but it sputtered out. He lit a second. The same thing happened. Midnite realized the matches were damp from being buried in the ground for so long. He carefully examined the remaining matches, knowing his time was running short. He chose a dry looking match and struck it forcibly against the scratch pad. It took! He quickly lit the saturated rag, turned around, got up and sprinted into the woods. He only ran about two hundred feet, stopped and climbed a small tree, to get a vantage point and to see what, exactly, had happened. He hadn't yet heard an explosion. From the tree,

it was difficult to see the gas can, but he thought he saw a slight glimmer of flame. Yes! There it was. The rag was suddenly burning fiercely. Then it happened. The gas can ignited, The car's gas tank blew, and the car exploded into the air as debris flew forcibly in all directions.

Midnite jumped off the tree and started running. He only had an approximate, vague plan on which direction to run. He had always been vigilant in assessing his surroundings whenever he had been on the road, both for the road gang and when he had had his meeting with the warden's associates. He ran in a north, northeast direction. He wanted to put as much distance between himself and the guards, while they were in a panic and trying to figure out what had happened and if anyone was missing.

Chapter VII
(Oh Lord!)

Midnite loped like a wolf. He could cover ground quickly, maintaining an even pace, and yet still conserve his energy and endurance. He wanted to stop and rest many times, but his fear of being captured kept him going. After two hours of running, he came to a small river. He threw himself to the ground and greedily gulped the refreshing, much needed water. He then had time to think.

"Did Scirelli die in the blast? Most likely he did. Would the camp have mounted a posse to search, find and return Midnite to camp? Most likely they did."

Midnite was searching his memory to see if he remembered any Bloodhounds or other hunting dogs at the camp. He didn't remember seeing any, but he was sure they had nearby sources for these tracking dogs. Midnite got up and started walking in the water. This not only cooled him off, but would also serve to throw the dogs off his scent, as they couldn't track him in the water.

Meanwhile, back at the worksite, there was still confusion. It had taken the guards time to figure out what had happened after the initial blast. Several of the guards had tried to free the trapped inmate from under the tractor, while others had run to the exploded car. They saw Kaminski, whose car it was, run towards the car. Therefore, it was initially thought, the body was an inmate's. They wrongly assessed he had tried to escape, but something had gone horribly wrong. However, Kaminski told everyone that Scirelli had kicked him out of the car, adding to the confusion. The body was so badly burned they couldn't accurately determine who it was. The lead guard decided to send the bus back to camp with the inmates and supplies. This also meant that some of the guards would have to return as well. He wanted to let the warden know, as soon as possible, what had transpired. So far, forty minutes had passed since the explosion.

"What the fuck! How? Tell me again, slowly!" The warden screamed. The lead guard tried to explain, along with some of the other guards and inmates. Finally, the warden threw up both his hands and screamed, very loudly, "Everybody, shut the

fuck up. I need one and only one person telling me what the fuck happened." He pointed at Roger. "You, speak now!"

Roger started slowly, stuttering and twitching. "Well, Mr. Warden, we, we, we was trying to get Harry up outta the ditch and from under the tractor that had slid into the ditch and pinned him down. S, Su, Su, suddenly we heard and saw Kaminski's car explode. I mean the shit flew everywhere, into the sky, it seemed like. We thought it was Kaminski, uh,um, until we seen him come running over. He told us Scirelli had thrown him outta the car. So, now we ain't sure if it's Scirelli in the car or someone else."

The warden was thoughtful. He rubbed his hands together, frowned, and turned bright red. Suddenly, he stopped moving. It appeared as though he stopped breathing. Then he muttered quietly to himself. Slowly, the words came out, "You…. said Scirelli…. was in the car? You have brought back all the inmates? Where the fuck is Midnite?" he screamed. "Find him now! It's either Midnite or Scirelli in that fuckin' car and I'll bet the camp it's not fuckin' Midnite!"

The guards did a quick search of the camp, not finding Midnite. Simultaneously, the warden mobilized vehicles, called his dog trackers and roared off in his jeep, followed by several of the guards who had returned to (the) camp with the inmates.

Three quarters of an hour later they arrived back at the work site. The car blaze was down to flickering flames, although the metal was still too hot to touch. The warden peered into the car, but couldn't get close enough to make a good identification. One of the guards had had the foresight to call the fire department. The fire trucks were now arriving. They saw what they had to do and promptly turned their hoses towards the flaming car. Fifteen minutes later, what was left of the car was cool enough to touch. The warden, who had searched the area looking for clues, came over to the car. As he peered in the car, he saw what was left of a Daytona Beach Florida Police Department shoulder emblem.

"It's Scirelli, let's go. Where are the fuckin' dogs?"

As the men gathered up their tracking gear and supplies, three trucks simultaneously screeched to a halt. Out jumped six dogs and two trainers from each truck. The warden was thinking quickly,

assessing the situation. The explosion had occurred approximately two to two and a half hours ago.

He bellowed out, “Fuck! That gives him a big lead. However, he doesn’t know the terrain, he has no supplies and he has no idea where we are. We should be able to catch up with him somewhere between four to six hours. We have nine guards and six deputies, along with eighteen dogs. Ok, boys. I want us to split up into three groups. Six dogs, two trainers and three guards in each group. Then, as we get deeper into the woods, we split up again. Three dogs, one trainer. Guards can choose who they stay with, but most of you probably won’t be able to keep up for too long. Move out!”

Midnite had walked in the river for six miles. He figured that would give him enough of a spread from where he had entered the water and where he was now. He realized, however, that the search team would assume he had traveled downstream. He only hoped he had traveled far enough that the dogs would be confused. As he stepped out of the water onto the embankment, he had an idea. He walked about twenty feet, and then walked backwards, tracing his footsteps. He did this

five times in succession, in various locations. He then tied leaves and twigs onto his feet, utilizing vines he found growing everywhere. Although his feet were tired and hurting, he kept the twigs on his feet for another five miles. At last, he stopped and removed the twigs and leaves. This had been slow going, due to the impediments attached to his feet. He realized he had to make up time. As Midnite broke into his lope, his feet continued to ache, but he was relieved his feet were once again on solid ground. He continued this pace for another four hours, until, fighting exhaustion, he lay down to rest. He instantly fell asleep.

Meanwhile, the search party was stumped. It had taken the dogs an extra three hours to search the riverbanks and finally find where Midnite had exited the water. The dogs took up the scent, started to howl, and promptly turned around and ran back to the riverbank, whining and confused. The search party was also confused. After deliberating, they came to the erroneous assumption that Midnite had returned to the water. They led the dogs further downstream, in the wrong direction.

O'Rourke had Marc and Deanna in his office.

"Okay," he said, "I have all the info we need to find the camp and the names of the primary culprits. We have a choice. Either we go up there alone or we assemble a task force."

Marc interjected and said, "I think we should call in the FBI. This crosses state lines. Then we can be pretty sure this issue won't be swept under the rug, as it probably would be if only locals were involved."

Deanna added, "How soon can we organize this? Oh God, I hope he's ok." Then, in a barely audible voice, she added, "I hope he's still alive."

Marc and O'Rourke exchanged grim glances. O'Rourke picked up the phone, dialed and said, "Hello, may I speak to the district director? No, I need to speak to him, now. This is an emergency situation and time is of the essence!"

Twenty minutes later, after establishing his identity and explaining the situation, he hung up the phone, turned towards Marc and Deanna and said. "He'll get back to us within twenty-four hours. He said they have to verify my information and establish a plan. The director said it's a tough sell, because we don't have any hard

evidence, no pictures, no proof, nothin' like that. There are probably some big time people involved, so they'll have to be very careful in their investigation. However, he believed me. Keep your fingers crossed."

Midnite woke up with a start. He took a few seconds to gather his thoughts and remember where he was. He quickly got up, glanced at the sun and tried to figure out direction and time. He presumed it was about six in the morning. He faced east and started loping again. Although he felt refreshed from his nap, he was sore, hungry and thirsty; He wondered where he was and how far he had yet to travel. He also was concerned where, exactly, his pursuers were. He loped for another few hours, until he came to a halt.

"Had he heard talking? Had the warden found him?"

His heart was racing as he cautiously hid behind a tree and looked around. Two men were walking on a dirt path directly in front of the tree he was hidden behind. They were dressed in running clothes and seemed to be talking about their jobs, women and life in general. Midnite's first thoughts were that this was an easygoing, normal conversation. Was civilization near? The

men continued walking. When they were almost out of view, Midnite slid out from behind the tree and followed them from a distance, ready to blend into the foliage if they turned around or glanced backwards. He felt like an animal stalking its prey. He knew what needed to be accomplished, what he had to do next. Midnite was well aware he still was wearing prison garb. He went back into the foliage as he neared the edge of the wooded area. He was both relieved and surprised that his hiding spot was directly across from the main drag of a town, which encompassed clothing stores, a small gym, restaurants, bars, liquor stores, a post office and a church. Smelling the food being prepared and cooked made him acutely aware of how hungry he was, as well as how dirty he would appear to anyone who saw him. Realizing he needed to eat and change his clothes, Midnite knew he'd have to do things out of his character. He had never intentionally hurt anyone, at least not if it hadn't been for self-defense or to defend someone who needed help. However, he had never been on the run, nor scared, starving and desperate. As these thoughts were being formulated in his mind, he observed the two men he had been following enter the gym, which was diagonally across from his hiding

spot. As he studied the area, he saw a man and a woman leaving the gym. They were speaking to the two men who had entered the workout gym.

"Frank," the woman shouted, "Ted and I are gonna grab some breakfast. You guys want anything?"

Midnite couldn't hear Frank's reply, but he realized the small gym was probably nearly empty. He waited about five minutes, to give the men inside time to get ready to go back to work and to make sure the roads were clear, with no cars or pedestrians to see him, as he darted across the street. He silently pushed open the door and peered inside. He heard voices from the locker room as he slid into the bathroom. Ripping off his prison garb, he wrapped it up in a towel and stuffed the abhorrent uniform into a garbage can. He grabbed a towel hanging from one of the stalls and quickly locked the door. He relieved himself and immediately went into the showers. Turning on the hot water, a gasp of pure pleasure escaped his lips. This was the first time he had felt hot water run over his body in many months. Staying under the wonderful stream of water longer than he knew he should, he was suddenly aware of voices growing nearer. He shut off the water, wrapped a towel

around his body, and ran over to the supply of towels, near the shower entrance. He grabbed another towel and put the second towel over his head as Frank and his friend were rounding the corner to the showers.

Covering his face, so it appeared he was drying his hair, he murmured, "Gentlemen."

They returned the acknowledgement, without a look his way. Midnite looked back to make sure they had entered the showers. He quickly went into the locker room, spotting two open lockers. Making a quick assessment of the clothes, he chose those closest to his size. Dressing quickly, he was surprised how well everything fit. Even the shoes were close to his size. Reaching into the back pocket of the trousers, he pulled out the wallet. There were about three hundred dollars, a couple of credit cards and family pictures. Midnite made a quick decision and took out one hundred and fifty dollars, leaving the wallet and everything else on the bench in front of the lockers. Exiting the gym, he casually strolled down the street, alert for any emergencies, which might occur, ready to flee if necessary. As he crossed the street, he noticed the two employees returning. He quickened his pace, putting as much distance between himself

and the gym as he could. Turning the corner, he noticed a Greyhound bus terminal. Midnite thought for a moment and entered the building. Quickly picking up the bus schedule, he determined which bus left the soonest and went the furthest away from this town, which he now knew was Jessup, Georgia. He bought a one-way bus ticket and left the terminal. He then went to a delicatessen directly across the street and bought a roast beef sandwich, with the works, chips and an iced tea. He had them put everything into a paper bag, paid the bill and immediately went back to the terminal, as the bus he had chosen was boarding.

Fifteen minutes later the bus pulled out. As the Greyhound made a left onto Main Street, he saw Frank and the two employees looking frantically up and down the street, shouting, “We’ve been robbed, help!”

Midnite scrunched down lower in his seat and turned his head looking out the opposite side of the bus. Was he free? Had he actually done this?

Chapter VIII

(Redemption?)

O'Rourke, Marc and Deanna were in a caravan behind FBI, Volusia County and State Troopers. They had been on the road since early morning and had now stopped at the gas station that was approximately two hours from their destination. The three of them were extremely anxious. They kept asking each other questions of doubt.

"What if we've been wrong? What if this doesn't turn out to be what we thought? What if Midnite isn't even there? Our asses will be strung up to dry," O'Rourke dryly observed.

After all the vehicles had gassed up, they took off in a continuous stream of dust. They were on a serious mission and the atmosphere was electric with tension.

Approximately two hours later, they arrived near the camp. The FBI agents and the state troopers were conferring. One of the agents motioned O'Rourke over. "This is your baby," he said, "however you're not P.D. anymore. So, officially you can't do what you're about to do, but get your ass in

there with us and find the guy you're looking for."

The attack force silently and methodically surrounded the camp, simultaneously deploying a contingent of Volusia County and state troopers to Camp II as well. This was to be a coordinated and swift attack for maximum surprise and hopefully, no gunfire or injuries. After all, some of the guards were fellow officers in the Volusia County police force. The guards within the compound were completely overwhelmed by the sheer force and magnitude of the raid. All the "prisoners" were grouped on one side of the camp and the guards on the other. There was an eerie silence as the inmates were realizing that, maybe, just maybe, their nightmare was over. The guards were quite shaken up because it was slowly dawning on them that they might be facing prison time. The agents, who included FBI, police and state troopers, were interviewing and interrogating both the inmates and the guards, trying to get a handle on exactly what they were dealing with. The magnitude and scope of what they were unearthing was bewildering and beyond the realm of their individual realities. Suddenly, a jeep screeched to a halt and the warden jumped

out of the vehicle, screaming, “What the fuck is going on here? You don’t have jurisdiction here; this is a private facility. I’m reporting all of you to the governor’s office!”

“Feel free,” the FBI director calmly replied, “but I think you’ll find he already knows about all of this. Oh, by the way, you’re under arrest.”

One of the agents went to cuff the warden. The director stopped him and said, “That won’t be necessary. We don’t need to humiliate him, at least not yet.”

He motioned to the warden and said, “Please follow me, we have many questions for you.”

Looking defeated, the warden complied, as they went into his office. O’Rourke, Marc and Deanna followed both of them. As they entered the office, the director nodded to O’Rourke. He walked up to the warden and said, “Do you know an inmate named Midnite?”

The warden gasped and said, “That’s where I just came from. We’re looking for him. He escaped yesterday after murdering one of our guards.”

Deanna let out a small scream. “What do you mean?”

The warden explained the events that had transpired. Of course, the story was changed to make the camp seem innocent and Midnite a bloody, evil murderer.

"This definitely will put a spin on the situation. Who is this guy, Midnite? Your buddy, right?" the director asked, looking directly at Marc.

"What is his real name? Where did he come from? Who knows him?"

Neither the warden, Marc or Deanna knew his "real" name, or even his surname. Everyone knew him simply as "Midnite." The camp had no information, whatsoever, on Midnite, or, for that matter, any of the inmates.

Two hours later, O'Rourke, Deanna and Marc left. They had not only questioned the warden, but interrogated the inmates, the guards and the girls from Camp II as well. They had heard many different variations of the story the warden had told them. The primary differences had pertained to Midnite's disposition, friendliness, extreme intelligence and likeability. The irony of the situation did not elude them. If Midnite had not escaped days earlier, he would now be free and not an escaped convict and alleged murderer.

Chapter IX

(Freedom?)

Midnite had been on the bus for sixteen hours. His head was buzzing with many thoughts. *"Was he truly free? Had he committed murder? Did Scirelli die? Would he eventually be caught? What would his family think of him now? Would or could anyone understand what had turned his life upside down? How would he be able to perform on stage, ever again, without being arrested?"*

The bus pulled into St Louis, its final destination. As Midnite disembarked, he glanced around, feeling like a fugitive, which, in essence, he was. Making a quick decision, he placed a call to his cottage. It rang six times. Just as he was about to hang up, he heard an out of breath voice say, "Hello."

There was silence on Midnite's end. Once again, he heard "Hello, who is this?"

Hesitantly, Midnite said, "Hey, Marc, it's me."

There was silence on the other end as the realization of who was on the line sunk in. Midnite heard Marc sobbing and asked, "Marc, what's wrong? Is everything okay?"

Marc said “Oh my god, Midnite. You’re alive! Where are you? Are you okay? Can we come meet you?”

Midnite replied, “Listen, man I have a lot of things to tell you. You won’t believe me, but it’s all true. I didn’t leave you guys, I was kidnapped and…...”

Marc cut him off, “Midnite,” he said, “we have a good idea of what happened.”

He then went on and explained to Midnite the events of the last couple of months, concluding with … “and the warden and many of his deputies are in custody, as we speak.”

Midnite was momentarily silent, as the totality of what had occurred clouded his thoughts.

“So, you’re telling me that after months and months of living in hell, living a nightmare, if I had waited a few more days, I would be free and not a murderer, not a fugitive?”

Marc avoided the answer and said, “Let me talk to some people. Now that we know you’re alive, we can formulate a plan. Do you have a number where we can reach you? Do you need any money? Where are you, man? Can I help you in any way?”

Midnite said, “No, not now, not yet. Where’s Deanna? Is she still around the scene?”

Marc replied, “Yes, she loves you man. She’s going crazy, thinking you were dead, or injured or in jail somewhere. I’ll tell her everything as soon as she arrives back home.”

Midnite hung up, feeling confused and dejected; many questions immediately surfaced.

“What have I done? What should I do? Where should I go? Will I end up in jail? Will I ever be able to play again?”

As his mind continued to tumble round and round, Midnite realized this train of thought would do him no good. He struggled within himself and made a decision. Digging change out of his pocket, he called Marc back.

When Marc answered, Midnite said, “Listen, man, I’m coming in. I’ll meet with you and Deanna, with this guy, O’Rourke, you told me about and I’ll call my parents and sisters to get feedback from them. Then, I will probably turn myself in. First, however, I’m going to call the newspapers and radio. I have a plan to turn this thing into a national news item, so at least I’ll help some of the other innocent people involved,

because I know with certainty that many false stories will be generated by the warden and all his cohorts, all the way to upper level government officials."

Midnite did as he said he would. He had the media get in touch with Marc and O'Rourke to verify and explain the magnitude of the nightmare he and many others had endured. The FBI officials, as well as state and local authorities were, of course, reticent to give any details, citing "an ongoing investigation."

Midnite spoke with his family and told of the events of the past months. They were in shock and wanted Midnite to return home to New York immediately. He further explained that he had much to do first. He had to face a murder charge, the escape and whatever else he would be indicted for. He also realized he could not yet personally speak with the media. He had to find and retain an attorney. Midnite wandered around St. Louis for five more days.

On the sixth day, he called Marc back. He told him that he would meet first with him and Deanna. After that meeting, he wanted them to meet with O'Rourke, to give details Mike was not aware of. After that, Midnite wanted to immediately interview

defense attorneys and start strategizing his defense. Marc informed him that he had set into motion the power of his family's connections. They also had connections in Florida and had set up a series of interviews with Midnite and a "bank" of attorneys, in order to form a comprehensive defense team. Midnite was of course, very, very grateful for Marc's much-needed assistance.

"However, first," Midnite said, "I want to, need to meet with Deanna. Please set that up for me."

Marc laughed and replied, "She's right next to me, I'll put her on." As Marc handed the phone to Deanna, he noticed she was shaking.

Slowly she brought the receiver to her ear and very quietly, whispered, "Oh, Midnite, oh, my God, Midnite, I was so scared, I felt so alone, I thought you were, you were……..." Midnite was holding back the tears as he listened to Deanna's pain.

"It's going to be okay. I'm safe now. We'll figure everything out. I'm coming back to Daytona and hope the authorities will be fair to me. Tell Marc to meet me at the Greyhound terminal downtown next Sunday. Check arrival times from St. Louis. You be at the cottage and I'll see you then.

And Deanna," he whispered, "I missed you terribly."

He hung up the receiver and slowly walked out of the booth. Checking his pockets, he saw he was running out of money, but estimated he had just enough to return to Florida. He walked downtown and bought a one-way ticket to Daytona. Midnite mused that he might never need a ticket out of Daytona. He knew he was in for a rough journey, hoping he wouldn't get too much jail time, that a jury would understand how things had occurred since the time he had been kidnapped. Midnite used up most of his money buying his ticket back to Daytona Beach. He hoped he had enough to buy a meal on the long and dreaded journey back to where hell had begun.

Marc was waiting at the terminal. As Midnite stepped down off the bus, they looked at each other, hugged and got quickly into the car.

"Whew!" Midnite said, "Please take me home. I need a shower, a meal, something to drink and then we'll talk. Is Deanna at the cottage? Does anyone else know I'm here? How are you, man? I appreciate your friendship, your help, more than you'll ever know."

Marc pulled the car over at the nearest curb. He stopped the car and turned towards Midnite. “Listen carefully, my man. You helped me before you knew me. You are a rare soul in this world. You are an extraordinarily gifted and talented musician; you have been through a long, long nightmare. Deanna and I are not only willing to help you; we are honored that we can. Believe me, you don’t have to thank us. The only other person that I know of that knows you’re arriving, is O’Rourke”

They hugged once again. As Marc resumed driving, Midnite leaned back and turned his head to look out the window. Tears silently fell onto his shirt.

Twenty minutes later they pulled into the driveway of the cottage. Deanna was sitting on the steps. She ran into Midnite’s arms as he alighted from the car. They didn’t say anything until their embrace ended.

Deanna looked at Midnite and said, “You’ve lost so much weight! Come on in, I’ve prepared a nice meal for you. I… I didn’t know what else to do.”

She started sobbing, pushed herself away and ran into the cottage.

Midnite looked at Marc, who smiled and laughingly said, “Well, you are a sight to behold!”

He put his arm around Midnite as they walked inside. Midnite felt awkward. He was now the stranger in his own home. His two friends had lived here longer than he had. He watched as they comfortably moved about. He intensely took everything in and decided to try to unburden himself. He told Deanna and Marc to sit directly across from him, so he could see both of them at the same time. He started explaining the sequence of events since his abduction. Leaving out no details, he, at times, grew agitated. Other times he wept, remembering the people he had known, who had been murdered, gone insane or just became shells of their former selves. Midnite told them about Camp Two, the brothel, the clientele and the patrons. Lastly, he explained the sequence of events that had brought him to murdering Scirelli, his escape and how he ended his time on the run.

Both Marc and Deanna were silent. Marc was shaking his head and staring blankly at Midnite. Deanna had her hand over her mouth; her eyes were huge with disbelief, because of what she had just heard.

"Okay," he said, "let's eat, I'm starving. I haven't had a home cooked meal in ages."

Deanna's "nice meal" was actually an amazing one. It consisted of a huge turkey, candied yams, sautéed string beans, stuffing and many condiments, complemented by a tasty white wine. As Midnite complimented her cooking repeatedly, Deanna remarked that not only had Midnite missed Thanksgiving, but they were all thankful that he was finally home safe and alive. Midnite said that he was also grateful to be where he was, right at this exact moment. He wasn't upset about missing Thanksgiving, however. He had always had ambiguous feelings towards that holiday. He explained that he enjoyed Thanksgiving because it brought family together, but he hated the thought that Americans celebrated the massacring of Native Peoples after they had helped the European settlers.

Marc finally broke his silence and said, "Midnite, I hate to interject into this wonderful gathering, but we will have to move quickly, so we can get you legal representation before they move to bring you into custody. Also, we have to meet

Mike O'Rourke in about two hours." Midnite only nodded his head in reply.

Deanna said, "Midnite, go take your shower, try to relax and get comfortable. Marc and I will clean up."

Midnite was grateful to be alone for a while. His mind was spinning with all the possibilities of what could happen in a relatively short period of time.

Marc and Deanna were quietly conferring. "He seems distant, not quite here," Deanna said.

"Well," Marc replied, "he probably isn't. Think of what he's been through. It's almost like a vet returning from war. To live each day fearing for your life takes a toll on your psyche You can be sure of that!"

As they were cleaning up the kitchen, the phone rang. Hearing the shower, Marc answered the call. It was O'Rourke. He was nervous and jumpy. "Hey Marc, is Midnite there yet?" he asked.

"Yes, he is," Marc answered, "Why, what's up?"

O'Rourke responded with, "Okay, hurry over to my office, I got the Feds sitting here, waiting for him. Immediately, now, hurry, ok?"

Marc asked, “How the hell do they know he was returning to Daytona? How do they know about you?”

O’Rourke quietly said, “I don’t know the answers to those questions. They’re the Feds. Just get your asses here as soon as possible.”

“Ok, ok, I gotcha, we’ll get there as soon as we can.”

Marc carefully put the phone onto its receiver, He was relieved to see Midnite walking towards him, towel drying his hair.

“Deanna, Midnite, come on, we gotta go, we gotta go, now! The Feds are waiting for us at O’Rourke’s office.”

Midnite walked out of the living room and into the kitchen. He needed to be alone with his thoughts. The moment of reckoning had arrived; the moment he knew could not be avoided. He went back into the living room, walked towards the telephone, picked it up and called his parents; He talked in a quiet voice. Marc and Deanna couldn’t hear his words. When Midnite hung up the phone, he turned towards Marc and Deanna.

Speaking in a low, but deliberate voice he said, “I’ll go there without representation, but if they haul me off, get me some, please. I don’t know what’s about to happen. I’ll probably have to serve time. I

hope I don't get the death sentence. There's time for all that, however. If they take me into custody today, I must prepare everything now. I spoke to my parents about my long term bank accounts and personal belongings. You guys can stay here for as long as you want. I asked my parents to pay the rent through the end of the year. All I have here is some clothing and my guitars. Please take care of them for me. Hopefully, they'll allow me to have them in prison."

As Marc and Deanna started to talk, Midnite held up his hand and said, "My friends, my true and invaluable friends, I know your hearts are pure. You are both truly good people. I'm glad I met you, I am. I appreciate all your help and the fact that even though you didn't know me for long, you believed in me and still searched for me and put your own lives on hold. That means more to me than all the valuables in the world."

Simultaneously they hugged and started crying silently, each with their individual thoughts racing through their heads.

Midnite broke away first and bravely said, "Okay, it's time. Let's go, now!"

They arrived at O'Rourke's office and sat down across from his desk. O'Rourke was pale and silent, merely nodding at Midnite, as three FBI agents entered the office. Agent Simon LaGrange looked like an accountant, Pete Petrus was a big hulking brutish man, and the third agent, Dan O'Malley, had the appearance of a polished politician.

After introductions, the "politician" said, "Midnite, please follow us."

Midnite turned towards O'Rourke inquisitively.

O'Rourke said, "They're going to use my other office for interrogation. I'm sorry, man. Sorry it's going down like this."

Midnite followed the agents into the other office. After the agents and Midnite left, Marc turned towards O'Rourke and exclaimed, "What the fuck was that? You couldn't have warned us, or told us how this was going down?"

O'Rourke said, "Listen, man. They came here unexpectedly, told me to get Midnite here ASAP, and told me not to say anything else. Therefore, I did not. They were standing right beside me when I made the call to you and they can be quite intimidating."

Frustrated, Marc and Deanna made small talk to pass the time. Occasionally, O'Rourke would say something. There was a nervous energy in the room, with many awkward silences.

Two hours later, Petrus walked into the office, threw down fifty dollars and said. "Here's some money. Could you please get us some lunch, and for you guys too?"

As he turned to leave, Marc blurted out, "What's going on in there? What is going to happen now? Why are you in a room alone with him? He should have legal representation. You're not beating him, are you?"

Petrus stopped in his tracks, turned and looked at the three concerned people and said, "Don't worry, he's being treated respectfully. Time will tell how this works out."

Looking around the room, Mike somberly assessed the situation, got up, grabbed the money and left to get them all lunch. When he was gone, Marc and Deanna talked quietly. "What do you think," Marc asked, "do you feel as though all this time passing is for the good? Do you think Midnite will do much time for what he did?"

Deanna thought for a few minutes without saying anything, then said, “You know, because it’s taking so long, I think It’s a good thing. If they had planned to arrest him, they would have slapped the cuffs on him and taken him away. Why would they go through all of this? Anyway, that’s the feeling I have.”

Marc nodded and said, “You know, you might have something there.”

Ten minutes later O’Rourke noisily entered the room, rustling bags and sorting out the various sandwiches and drinks. The intensity in the room kept the three of them from speaking. O’Rourke handed Deanna and Marc their sandwiches and drinks, then gathered up the rest of the food and went into the adjoining meeting room, to give the agents and Midnite their respective lunches. As he entered the room, he noticed that the four men were huddled closely together, as though they had been speaking very privately. They were silent as he entered the room. O’Rourke noticed that Agent LaGrange had been writing in a booklet; his pen was poised over the tablet. The two other agents were flanking Midnite, but O’Rourke observed that although the men were on alert, there appeared to be an understanding between them and Midnite.

Mike couldn't put a finger on it, but the vibe was different than he had expected. They all thanked him for bringing the food. Mike gave Petrus his change and stood there, trying to think of something to say.

Petrus said, "Thanks buddy, we'll be done shortly." O'Rourke took his cue and left.

When he returned to his office, Marc and Deanna looked up at him apprehensively.

O'Rourke shrugged his shoulders. "I don't know what to tell you. Nobody said anything to me, except that they'll be finished soon. The strange thing is that I didn't get a bad vibe. It almost seemed as though they were friendly towards each other."

Not much else was said for the next three and a half hours. They all took turns going to the bathroom. They went outside for fresh air. They were very nervous. After four hours had passed, the three of them returned to O'Rourke's office. Marc had started to ask a question, when two of the agents, Petrus and LaGrange entered the room.

LaGrange spoke first, "We thank you, Mr. O'Rourke, for your generosity,

your cooperation and the use of your facilities. We know it was an inconvenience. However, because of the seriousness and severity of this case, we concluded that a private setting would be more conducive to our needs."

Petrus chimed in, "That friend of yours is quite a remarkable man, unlike anyone I've ever known. His story has been both horrific and uplifting at the same time. Horrific because of the events and traumas he endured, but uplifting because of his attitude and optimism towards his fellow man."

Deanna, unable to contain herself any longer, blurted out, "Excuse me, sir! What does all this translate to? Will he have to do much time? When will he be arraigned, when……."

Petrus stopped her by raising his hand. He simply said, "Let Midnite explain everything in his own words."

He had barely finished his sentence when Midnite and O'Malley entered O'Rourke's office. Midnite faced the three G-men, shook their hands, gave his heartfelt thanks, sat down and gave a giant sigh. The agents left as silently as they had appeared. Marc, Deanna and O'Rourke threw questions at him in a staccato of words. Now

it was Midnite's turn to raise his hand in an effort to silence his friends.

"This has been a day I will surely never forget. I am, however, under oath to never reveal some of the details to anyone," he said, as he tensely looked everyone in the eye, being sure he was fully and unconditionally understood. "I also am aware of everything you all have done for me, your dedication in trying to locate me, O'Rourke's more than beyond the call of duty, risking his friendships and reputation, Deanna and Marc's loyalty and devotion. I will never, ever forget, nor be able to repay you." Midnite once again held up his hand. "Please don't ask me any questions. I will give you the highlights without divulging any sworn secrets. However, knowing you, I am sure you'll be able to fill in the blanks," he slyly said, as he gave an obvious wink. It continues to be a bizarre, contradictory, and not quite believable episode of my life. It is reflective of the diseases within our society, our government and ourselves, as individuals. So, here's how it stands, at least as of now, today: Because of the magnitude of the criminality, the abuse, the forced slavery and labor, the kidnappings, the prostitution ring, the two states' governments involvement, the killings and

tortures that occurred, as well as a myriad of other reasons, no charges will be assessed against me. As long as and if, I "forget" about ever uttering another word of this, never reporting to the media, nor even my friends or family. I will have to occasionally meet and report to the authorities, as they request or need additional information. They already sent a retraction to the media. I wasn't happy about that, but they promised that I'll get updates on exactly who will be indicted. As of now, the media has been issued a story that what I had you report," Midnite nodded to Marc and O'Rourke, "is under active investigation. It's sterile at best, but I'm sure more will come."

Deanna interjected. "What about what happened to Scirelli?"

Midnite looked at her and said, "Sorry, off limits, at least for now. The entire Volusia County police force is under investigation, as is the mayor's office, all the way up to the governor's administrations. I also went into great detail with the Feds, about the events of the night and morning this all started, when innocent men, women and children were mowed down." Midnite took a deep breath and slowly exhaled. "Now I have to try to re-assemble my life,

and my career and reconnect with my music."

Deanna was rocking back and forth, her arms around her legs. Marc was staring into space, just thinking. He looked up at Midnite and asked him if he had any immediate plans.

Midnite responded, "I need my music, I need to play. I need to write, to expunge, and to feel human again. I don't know what you two want to do, but I welcome you to stay with me. I love you both."

Midnite turned towards O'Rourke. "I want to thank you as well. You put yourself on the line for me, for my investigation. I owe you."

O'Rourke simply said, "No you don't. What happened to you was a nightmare. It still is incomprehensible. I am honored to have been a part of this investigation, to finally see your face and more importantly, to personally meet you. Furthermore, I will not accept any more payment."

Midnite stood up, walked over to O'Rourke and hugged him. Then he walked to the door, put his hand on the knob, turned facing his three friends and said, "I'm going

for a walk, I need to think. I am grateful simply to be free. I need some fresh air."

He turned and walked out the door, down the steps and outside. He took another deep breath, exhaled deeply and walked along the beach. He walked and walked until he reached the area where the massacre of innocent people had occurred. He was having flashbacks, remembering the carnage, the shock and revulsion of the entire scene. He noticed a movement, a shadow coming towards him. Suddenly his arm was grabbed. It was Joey D., "The Rat." He wasn't happy.

"Listen to me, you faggot. You killed my best friend. You ruined my life. The Feds are all over us. There ain't nowhere you can hide. We, me and the boys, will find you, no matter where you go. I'd kill you now, but the time ain't fuckin' right. So, look over your shoulder, don't sleep, 'cause we are gonna get ya."

Midnite looked Joey in the eyes, spat on his boots and walked away. He knew what he had to do. Walking slowly towards home, he continued formulating his plan. If he stayed in Daytona, it wouldn't end well. Unless, or until, the corrupt Volusia County police were ever indicted or put away, his life would be in danger. He didn't want to

leave Marc and Deanna so soon after his escape, but he felt there was no choice for him. Ironically, he had just invited them to stay with him, but after the last six months, he just couldn't mentally deal with more psychopaths or violence. He needed good times. He needed to envelop himself with open-minded intelligent people and music. He knew he would have to leave Daytona until things blew over.

Then, (he had) an epiphany! He would use his creativity to bring messages of reality to the populace. These messages would inspire and bring together the many diverse political, economic and racial segments of America and the world. He knew the primary causes of racism, discrimination and economic inequality were due to the suppression of education, that keeps people ignorant and divided.

As he continued walking, he decided he would return home to the cottage. He needed sleep and lots of it. He would continue his thoughts in the morning. His plans needed to be explained to his friends before he left.

Midnite woke up, feeling refreshed, yet not comfortable with himself. Marc and Deanna were in the kitchen, preparing

breakfast. “Well, look who’s up!” Deanna happily said.

“Hey, guys, good morning,” Midnite replied. “Let’s eat and after breakfast I have to share some thoughts of mine with you. I need some feedback.”

Although the three friends conversed throughout breakfast, Marc and Deanna realized Midnite wasn’t really mentally present. He seemed distant, preoccupied. They attributed his mood to his recent trauma. Midnite, however, was not dwelling on the past six months, but on his future plans. When breakfast was finally over, Midnite asked for a hot cup of coffee.

Deanna had made him a cup, he politely took it from her and said, “Okay, my friends, please follow me into the living room.”

When the three of them were seated, Midnite relayed the particulars of his confrontation with Joey D. He continued with his thoughts about leaving Daytona in order to stay away from immediate danger, not only for himself, but to keep Marc and Deanna out of danger as well. He also spoke of his desire to not only jump-start his musical career, but also to give his message to humanity. After he finished his soliloquy, there was silence.

Marc spoke first. “Well, I understand what you are saying and why. But aren’t you, in a sense, letting Joey the asshole win? Aren’t you letting them best you, even after all you’ve accomplished and endured?”

Deanna added, “Midnite, you are finally home. You need to rest, to get strong again, to eat good food. Look at you, you must have lost thirty pounds. You’re physically weak and mentally tired. If you get on the road right away, you’ll get ill. Stay here and get strong. Then we’ll figure something out.”

Marc chimed in again, “We’ll get in touch with the FBI gents, tell them what you just told us, have them “talk” to Joey and the boys and see how it goes. What do you think? It should take some of the heat off you and give you time to recuperate.”

Midnite was thoughtful. He took his friends’ advice to heart. “I guess I was reacting out of fear and having flashbacks. Seeing and hearing the “Rat” speaking gave me the creeps. I just don’t want to be near or even in the vicinity of these warped people anymore. However, I am willing to give it a try. I’ll call Petrus in a few minutes. His appearance belies his sensitivity, he was the

most understanding of that trio," Midnite explained.

"Come to think of it, he did say nice things about you in O'Rourke's office," Deanna said.

"Anything else?" Midnite inquired of his friends.

"No, let's get this in action as soon as possible and see how soon Petrus, or whoever, can motivate the boys in Daytona to act like police officers, not thugs," Mark angrily said.

Midnite got up and walked to the phone. "Okay, I'm ready. I'll call Petrus right now. I'll let you know if I can reach him and I'll let you know the outcome,"

He grabbed a drink out of the fridge, picked up the phone and dialed. Petrus answered on the third ring. Midnite explained what had happened on his way home the night before. Petrus was immediately very upset.

He said, "Don't worry, Midnite. I'm on my way as soon as we hang up. I'll take some of the boys with me. We'll talk to Joey's superiors. We'll also talk to the boys in blue. However, I will personally talk to Joey, rest assured. This whole thing has me and the FBI, officially and personally, very upset."

Midnite was happy with Petrus' response and promise of immediate action. He had connected with him as a human being, not as an FBI agent. Prior to this, he had his own thoughts about the FBI and how they operated. J. Edgar Hoover, Midnite thought, was a very disturbed and dangerous individual. Therefore, the directives that were issued by him and to his agents, were, by default, dangerous as well, especially concerning activist citizens.

Deanna had to leave for work at Hojo's and Mark had to run some errands. Midnite stayed home for a few hours, thinking and planning. He also played his beloved guitars. This is what he had missed more than anything else!

Midnite had decided to meet up with Deanna at Howard Johnsons, not for their food, but just to see her. As he turned the corner from his cottage, his antennas went up. He saw some suspicious-looking men, in suits. They were definitely out of place in this neighborhood, where the populace was made up of primarily blue collar types. As he turned the next corner, he saw in the reflection of a storefront window, that they were still behind him. He turned around and

they stopped walking. They were acting as though they were admiring something in the store they were standing in front of. Midnite was pissed. He walked directly up to the two men. “Why are you following me?” he demanded.

“Relax, buddy. Midnite, right?” Midnite just stared at the speaker. “We’re Petrus’ men. He wants us to watch over you.”

“Shit! I’m sorry”, Midnite sheepishly replied. “I thought you might have been some goons from Joey D.’s group. I apologize, my mistake.”

“Hey, no worries,” the agent replied, “but turn around and keep walking, so no one else notices anything.”

Midnite smiled and did as requested. He continued his walk to see Deanna. His thoughts had taken a turn. He really wanted to leave Daytona, but he also respected his friends’ opinions and even somewhat agreed with them. He was in a dilemma about what to do. Suddenly he had a thought. He would try to find Sunny, the drummer from the Magic Mushrooms. Maybe he could resume where he had left off before his abduction.

When Midnite arrived at Hojo’s, he saw Deanna waitressing in the back section

of the restaurant. He walked to another area, unseen by Deanna. Then he casually sat down and motioned to a waitress. He ordered dinner and asked her if there was a newspaper around that he could read while he was eating.

The waitress said, “Sure, I’ll be right back with one.”

When she returned and handed the newspaper to Midnite, he smiled and said, “Please come closer.” The waitress complied, with an inquisitive expression on her face. He asked her if she knew Deanna. She replied in the affirmative and said, “She’s working another section, not this one.”

Midnite laughed and said, “I know, I know. She doesn’t realize I’m here and I want to surprise her. Is there any way you could ask her to help you out and take this table? I’m going to hide behind this paper, so she won’t know who I am.”

The waitress replied, “Oh yeah, sounds like fun. You’re cute, too!”

Midnite smiled and thanked her for helping him realize his prank and for the compliment. A few minutes passed before Midnite saw Deanna approaching. He made believe he was reading and covered his face with the newspaper. Deanna came over to

his table and asked, “Excuse me sir, may I help you?”

In his best German accent Midnite said, “Jawohl. Diese eier sind nicht gut, meine frau!”

Deanna blushed and stammered, “Excuse me sir, could you repeat that?”

Midnite, smirking to himself, said, “Acht, yung lady, zein eggzzzz are tewible.”

“Oh, I’m so sorry sir. Here, give them to me and I’ll take care of everything!”

Putting down the paper, Midnite laughed heartily as he said, “I knew you would, miss, I knew you would.”

Deanna’s mouth opened in surprise. “You fucker!” she said. “What are you doing here? You really had me fooled. I had no idea it was you. I didn’t even know you spoke German.”

Midnite was still chuckling. “Well, I missed my girl, and I was hungry.” “Unt, dere are many ‘tings about me you don’t know,” he playfully said.

Deanna was happy to see him. She told him she would surprise him with an extraordinary dinner.

“In the meantime,” she said, “I have to get back to my section before I get fired.”

She gave him a kiss on the cheek and happily skipped away. A half hour later,

after he had finished eating, he said good-bye to Deanna and was out the door and on his way. He would call Ramirez and try to get an update on where the Magic Mushrooms were currently gigging. He promised himself that he would also try to find a sensei, so he could hone his skills in either Shotokan or Aikido, his two favorite styles of martial arts. He had a feeling he might soon need them.

When he arrived home, he picked up the phone and was about to dial, when Mark came out of the kitchen and into the living room. He sat down next to Midnite with a serious look on his face. Midnite put down the phone and asked what was wrong.

Mark replied, “Nothing’s wrong, but I need to talk to you. I have to get back to school if I’m to keep my scholarship. I’m getting pressure from the school and my family.”

Midnite replied, “You need to do that. You’re close to getting your degree and I know it’s important to you. It will enable you to fulfill your dreams.”

“I know, that’s all true, but you need me, man. You still are repairing yourself and I can help you in the meantime.”

Midnite looked at his friend with admiration. “You are a great person and I appreciate your loyalty to me. However, you need to think of yourself, as well. Please return to school. We’ll always be friends, brothers, really. You need to do this.”

Marc replied, “Thank you, man. Thank you for understanding. I’ll have to leave in a few days to start on time, check in and all that.”

Midnite responded. “Make your arrangements and we’ll tell Deanna together. I know she’ll be bummed. Also, I’ve been planning on hooking up with, maybe, Sunny, or someone. I need to start playing again and now I have a vision on a theme for my music. I need to get some messages out to the public before it’s too late for the American people. Maybe I can help in some small way.”

“What about Deanna? Who will be with her?” Mark asked.

“I don’t plan on going anywhere, at least not immediately. I’ll put something together locally. There must be some decent rehearsal studios around here,” Midnite replied.

They hugged and smiled at each other. The two friends went their separate ways, both lost in thought.

Midnite remembered he had been about to make a call to Ramirez before Mark had come into the room. He walked back into the living room, picked up the phone and dialed his friend's number. When Ramirez answered, he was very upset.

"Where have you been? I've been waiting to hear from you. I had no way to contact you. You never gave me your phone number or address. This isn't like you, man. Tell me what's up!"

Midnite took a long deep breath. He gave Ramirez a synopsis of the events that had occurred over the last six months. There was a stunned silence on the other end of the line.

Finally, Ramirez said, "Wow! I'm sorry, man. Sorry I was upset with you. Sorry you went through what you went through. What can I do to help? Is there anything you need, mi hermano?"

Midnite replied, "I look at it like this. The shit happened. I can't wallow in self-pity. I just want to resume where I was before my abduction. So, in that vein, I've thought about putting a group together, to give my message to the people. Tell me, can you find the drummer for the Mushrooms for me? I'd like to start there. He has the right feel for me."

Ramirez laughed and said, “Well, the universe is calling. I spoke to him a few days ago. He feels stifled with the Mushrooms. He’s looking for a new direction, but hasn’t connected with anyone that musically interests him. In the meanwhile, he’s heading to Fort Lauderdale for a gig. So, ironically, he’ll be back in Florida. Actually, your name came up. He had asked what happened to you. I didn’t know what to tell him. Now I do. I’ll see if I can reconnect with him. I’ll get back to you as soon as I know something. Yo, bro’, give your phone number.”

Midnite laughed and complied, then said, “Listen bro. everything I told you before is extremely confidential. Tell no one anything about it. Part of my deal with the Feds was to keep my mouth shut.”

“I understand and will honor your wishes, no worries, my man,” They hung up after expressing their love and admiration for each other.

Over the next few days, life kept on an even keel. Mark and Midnite had explained Marc’s situation to Deanna. Although sad, Deanna understood and supported his decision to return to school. After a touching farewell, Marc left in the middle of the week. This gave Midnite and

Deanna time to be alone, to reconnect. Actually, they surmised, it was the first time they had truly spent any meaningful time together. They acted like teenagers. They went to the beach, an amusement park, a romantic dinner and on many other enjoyable fun-filled adventures. They truly enjoyed each other's company.

Two weeks later, Ramirez called. "I have good news," he said to Midnite.

"Sunny is on his way to Daytona, specifically to meet with you. I told him you'd been incommunicado because you had had some serious family business to attend to, but now everything's cool and you are ready to work. Oh, he also said to meet him at the, ah, a place called the Riviera. Said you would know where it is. He said to meet him at 7:30 tomorrow night."

"Wow!" Midnite replied, "That *is* great news. Once again, thank you, bro. I'll keep you posted on all the results. Hey, if things work out, the way I have a feeling they will, think about managing us. Bye."

Midnite laughed and hung up before Carlos could respond.

The next morning Midnite took out his Stratocaster and started playing. He felt as though he was very rusty. He had hardly

played at all during his incarceration and only once, since he had returned home. He played for seven hours with only a short break. During his practice he added to and improved the song he had written while in the sweatbox. He wanted to remember and feel the emotion and fear he had felt while he had hung upside down, with no food or water. His guitar screamed and wailed for him. It became an extension of his inner being. He was ready!

Chapter X

(The Healing)

That night Midnite met Sunny. They were both nervous, knowing this was a meeting that could alter the course of their lives. After they had caught up with happenings in their respective lives, Sunny said, “I don’t know about you, but I wanna play.”

Midnite answered by taking his Strat out of its case, strapping it on and tuning up.

“What do you want to play?” Sunny asked.

Midnite looked him in the eyes and just stared. After what seemed like an eternity he started strumming some chords, getting his feel, his rhythm. Then he switched to lead. Sunny joined in, smiling ecstatically. As they played, they felt and understood each other’s souls. They meshed as though they had been playing together for years, not minutes.

A few hours later they were exhausted, but happy and deep in conversation.

“You know,” Midnite said, “That’s as close to making love as you can get!”

Sunny laughed and said, “I don’t know. Making love for you must be pretty good. I’ve never come close to that feeling.”

Midnite smiled and replied, “Well, that’s too bad, bro. Maybe one day that will change for you. I hope so. Here’s what I’m thinking…….” Midnite went on to explain his plans for putting together a touring and recording group. He further outlined his vision to explore new musical avenues, to create messages for the people. Declarations of hope created in a way so the average person would be able to relate to and further them. Midnite wanted to create a movement of social awareness.

“First things first,” he said, “Do you know of any bass players or conga players that could hang with us? I’d like a heavy rhythm section, to enhance and complement your drumming. Maybe later, once we’re tight, we could add some horns. That would also give me the freedom to be more creative, to really stretch out.”

Sunny was deep in thought. Suddenly, he snapped his fingers. “You know,” he said, “there *is* this bass player I know, lives in L.A. I’m thinking he might be the right dude for us. I know his lady, Cynthia; we went to school together. I’ll see what I can do. I’m also thinking it may be

hard for us to entice players, though, ‘cause we ain’t known. Why would they want to play with us?”

Midnite, as usual, just laughed. “Aw, man. I ain’t worried about that. The universe is on my side. I’ve been tested. It’s payback time. You’ll see. So, how long you gonna be in these parts? What are your plans?”

Sunny replied, “Well, I came here just to hook up with you. After Ramirez said he’d finally found you, I didn’t waste any time. I didn’t want you to disappear on me again. Anyway, I’ll have to go home to Virginia, get my ‘on the road stuff,’ say about a week or so, then I could return back to Daytona. Any idea where I could stay? I mean we ain’t gigging yet and I could use the money I made for food and shit, but I won’t have enough for hotels.”

Midnite said, “Don’t worry, man. I’ve got a spare room. A friend of mine just went back to school, so that’s cool. I’ll have to figure out a way to get some money, though, cause if this dude comes in from L.A., he’ll need a place, too. We’ll have to figure things out, is all. I’ll also have to call Carlos back and see who is the baddest conga player he knows. Yeah, man. I’m getting excited! So, get back home as soon as you can, get your shit together and return

here in two weeks. That cool? Hopefully by then you'll have gotten in touch with Mr. Bass, and I'll have some news about Mr. Conga player. Right now, however, come home with me. You will see where your new temporary home is and you can meet mi chica, Deanna. By the way, where did the Mushrooms rehearse when you guys gigged here?"

Sunny said, "Cool, sounds great. Uh, we rented a studio near the beach. It's right in between the Holiday Inn and some No Tell Motel. Studio's called Paradise Studios. It's okay. You know, nothing fancy."

"I don't give a shit," Midnite said, "as long as we can rehearse without interruption. Since it's just "okay," it shouldn't cost much either, right?"

They bantered back and forth for a while, then decided to go to Midnite's cottage, grab a bite to eat and continue their planning.

Deanna returned home from work, just as they were opening the door to go in. Midnite introduced the two of them then decided to cook dinner and discuss the guest rules, privacy issues, and the like. After dinner was finished, Midnite excused himself from the table. He placed a call to

Ramirez. Twenty minutes later he returned, poured himself a glass of wine and said, "Well, that went well. Carlos has agreed to play congas and percussion for us. He also accepted my invitation for him to manage us. Things are coming together! We just have to figure out where we're going to headquarter, rehearse and pay for everything."

Sunny was excited. He asked if he could use Midnite's phone because he wanted to call Cynthia, to get in touch with the bass player. When Midnite nodded in the affirmative, Sunny called the bass player's girlfriend. When she answered the phone he ran down Midnite's proposal. She told Sunny he would be hearing from him soon, either way.

Sunny hesitated, then said, "I have one question. What is his name? I know you introduced us, but I've been trying to remember, with no luck."

Cynthia laughed, "His name is Derrick. Derrick Morgan. You'll be hearing from us shortly. Should we call you at this number? The one you gave me today?"

"Yes," Sunny replied. "I'll be going to Virginia to get my gear, so I won't be here. Just ask for Midnite or Deanna.

Derrick will want to talk to Midnite, anyway. He's putting all this together."

After they hung up, Sunny walked back into the living room and explained his conversation to Midnite. "Let's keep our fingers crossed," Midnite said.

"Yeah, for sure," Sunny replied. "By the way," he continued, I'm going to head out to Virginia and get my stuff. Things might be happening quickly and I want to be prepared. Did you guys work out when Ramirez will be heading down here?"

Midnite said, "Well, I explained that you'll be going home for a week or so. He has to prepare as well, you know, pack up for the long haul, get his finances together, figure out where he'll be staying, in proximity to us. He also has to find someone to look after his apartment. Anyway, with all that, it'll be about two weeks before he can come down. I also have to find him a place to stay. While you're in Virginia, I'll find out if Paradise studios will be available. So we have a lot to do, hopefully in a short period of time."

Sunny left the following morning. After Deanna went to work, Midnite took out his Strat and started composing some new material, portrayed by his emotional

state, filled with memories of his involuntary incarceration. Although his music reflected these emotions, it didn't directly reference either the camps or the people. Instead, he used them metaphorically, in order to convey the corruption and mental instability of America's society. His songs almost always ended with optimism and hope for the future. He felt compelled to tell a story within each song's structure. Midnite wanted this dynamic, coupled with his musical virtuosity, to be his trademark signature, enabling the music to be instantly recognized as his. Midnite composed for the next four days. It was freedom for him. He reveled in his time alone. Although he had deep feelings for Deanna he needed this alone time, to heal his psyche. His writings and compositions, along with the feel of the guitar in his hands and against his body, let his spirit soar into the heavens.

On the fifth day, as he was preparing to practice, Derrick called. It was a call that would ultimately change the desideratum of their lives, as well as those of the other members of the soon-to-be formed band. Midnite and Derrick talked for over an hour. They felt as though they had known each

other for an eternity. During this conversation, Derrick decided to join the others in Florida, to at least see how everyone jived and played together. Figuring it would be about two weeks before Sunny returned and Carlos would be able to arrive, Midnite told Derrick to prepare to arrive within that time frame as well. After their contact information was exchanged, Midnite informed Derrick that things were being arranged for their living arrangements, studio time, sound equipment and the like. Derrick explained that he had just come off of a European tour and could probably borrow some sound equipment, such as three bass guitars, amps and other assorted paraphernalia. He was ready to travel. After their conversation ended, Midnite felt happier than he had in many months. Things were finally looking positive. It was almost as if things were going too well. Wanting to update Carlos and Sunny of this new development, he placed calls to both of them. Neither was home.

That night, as Deanna and Midnite were in bed, Midnite explained to Deanna what was happening and what he felt and hoped would happen within a relatively short period of time. Although he was exuberant, Deanna wasn't. She had no

doubts that Midnite would be successful in his endeavors. She was happy about that. However, she felt that with success, Midnite would ultimately be lost to her, probably forever. Midnite scoffed and tried to minimize the possible consequences.

Deanna ended that conversation with, “Time will tell, Mr. Midnite, time will tell!”

The next morning, after Deanna had left for work, Midnite prepared to pencil in some improvements to his songs. As he reached for his charts and guitar, he heard a knock on the door. He let out an expletive, but got up and opened the door. He was shocked to see Petrus and two other agents standing there.

“Aw, shit, man, this probably ain’t too good, right?” Midnite asked.

“Glad to see you, too!” Petrus shot back. The two agents standing behind Petrus were smirking.

Midnite laughed and said, “Sorry, man. It’s just a shock to see you here. I wasn’t expecting you to be standing in my doorway. What’s up?”

Petrus, moved his head up and down, indicating he wanted to enter Midnite’s house.

Midnite cocked his head sideways and said, “Sure, come on in.”

Petrus had a serious look on his face. “Listen, Midnite, we like you, otherwise we wouldn’t be here. I’ll get to the point. Seems as though we’re getting a lot of pushback from the higher-ups. We haven’t been able to round up or indict everybody we wanted to. The warden’s out on bail and the mayor and governor have stalled our proceedings.”

He looked even more serious as he continued. “That includes your boy, Joey D. and his gang of sadists.”

Those words chilled Midnite to the bone.

“Thing is, Midnite,” Petrus continued, “we need you to hang around because we’ll need your testimony, or at the least, multiple depositions from you at some point in the near future.”

Midnite had a multitude of emotions simultaneously course through his mind. He was angry, scared and confused; angry because the “wheels of justice” appeared to be broken wheels. Many promises had been made to him about the rounding up, indicting, conviction and incarceration of the guilty parties; scared because he would, more than likely, have to deal with the cruel,

corrupt and sadistic cops that would now feel empowered to continue their criminal, immoral and brutal ways; confused, because he had just been starting to feel normal again. Now he didn't know which way to turn, nor what to do. He relayed these thoughts to Petrus and his companions.

Then he added, "So, what does that mean exactly? You're saying I can't leave because you'll need my testimony. You're also saying Joey D. and his assholes are currently free to do what they do, with no consequences? What the hell happened to the tempest that was supposed to ensue? To all the bigwigs that were going to pay for ruining hundreds of lives! For killing God knows how many people. What about the forced labor and abductions? What about the beautiful homes, driveways and landscaping done by the abducted? What about the women who were forced into prostitution? What the fuck are you telling me?"

The three agents had their heads down and eyes averted. They couldn't look Midnite in the eyes. They were ashamed of what was about to be said.

"Well, unfortunately," Petrus said, "This goes to the top, as you know. I mean even though the governor's and mayor's offices have been implicated, there is

pressure like you wouldn't believe. People fear for their jobs, so things are progressing very slowly. Everyone wants to be very careful."

Midnite was livid. "So, you're telling me that although people have been killed, along with everything else I mentioned, a myriad of obscene crimes, politicians are worried about their jobs, about their careers? You're fucking kidding me! You know what, our deal is off. I'm going to the press. I'm not worried about my job."

Petrus reached out and grabbed Midnite's arm. "Whoa, hold on. I didn't say it was over, just that we're being cautious, taking it slow, to get everything right. When we have gathered all our evidence, testimonies and proof, we will proceed. Even the Federal Department of Justice is involved. Please, Midnite, give us time," Petrus pleaded, "we'll get it done. It's complicated."

"What about the fucking rat, Joey D.? What do I do when and if he confronts me again? Dealing with someone like him, well, I'll just say there aren't too many options available."

Midnite let that comment linger, then said, "Reality is that you and your boys won't be able to watch or protect me twenty-

four seven. I have things I'm trying to accomplish. I'm not stopping my life because of some sick, demented people, no way, man."

One of the agents spoke up, "Listen Midnite, we have been covering you, pretty much all the time. Us boys are quite upset about what happened to you and all the others. We are doing things, shall we say "unofficially", to speed things up. We pretty much know where Joey and his friends are all the time. He is walking around, it's true, but we have the wraps on him. We're just looking for an excuse to uh, make him disappear, maybe."

Petrus shot him an angry look. "Shut up, fool!" he bellowed. "Are you kidding me?" The agent looked away sheepishly, realizing he had said more than he should have.

Midnite was upset and said, "Yeah, whatever. In the meantime, I have a bad feeling. I know these guys. They don't care about your law. They're sick, I mean really sick. They'll figure a way to find me. When they do, one of us won't be around to talk about it. I don't want to have to deal with this anymore. Maybe I should follow my gut and vamoose. Oh, but I can't, you need me,"

Midnite said quite facetiously, as he ushered them out and slammed the door.

Chapter XI

(Commencement)

Midnite leaned with his back against the door and took deep rapid breathes. He was shaking. He realized his illusion of being free was mostly in his mind. It took a full ten minutes for his breathing to return to normal. He walked over to his guitar and picked it up. Cursing, he abruptly threw it down.

"This sucks," he thought, *"this really sucks!"*

He stormed out the door, but then turned around and went back into the house. He picked up the phone and ordered a cab. Twenty minutes later he heard the beeping of a car horn.

He went outside, got in the back seat and said to the driver, "Please take me to the Aikido dojo." It's near the band shell."

On the short ride to the dojo, Midnite reminisced about the years he had studied various martial arts styles. His personal favorites were Shotokan and Aikido. He had started at a very young age and enjoyed the mental, physical and spiritual challenges it had presented to him. Of his many friends, his sensei from the Aikido dojo was his

biggest mentor. He had taken Midnite under his wing, when he had seen his dedication and love for the arts. He especially admired Midnite's dedication to the spiritual aspect of Aikido. He taught Midnite that one never starts a fight, but if provoked, should finish it well, not out of anger or fear, but with precision and honor.

Midnite paid the fare and stood in front of the dojo, trying to get a feel for the instructors as well as the vibe of the dojo itself. Satisfied, he removed his shoes and entered, searching out who should train him. He was on a mission. He had no time to waste. He studied the techniques and attitudes of the various sensei. One of the sensei, the owner, came over to him.

"Hello," he said. "May I help you?" The man had a friendly, open way about him. His physique was that of a swimmer, with toned, sinewy muscle. He walked like a tiger, smoothly and with purpose.

Midnite liked what he saw. "Yes, sensei, you may," Midnite said, as he bowed in respect. "I need to sharpen my skills. I would like to study with you three times a week when I'm in town."

The sensei now assessed Midnite. He was surprised at Midnite's bearing, his

confidence, the respect he had shown and his demeanor. These attributes told the sensei this was a serious young man.

"What level are you at?" he asked. "I'll need to know who I should assign to you."

Midnite looked the sensei in the eyes.

He said, "You. I pick you, no other here. To assess my level, let's spar. Words are meaningless. I don't have my gi, but my street clothes will suffice for today, if it is okay with you, sensei."

They introduced themselves to each other. The sensei introduced himself as Aikio. They shook hands, bowed, took five steps apart, turned around and faced each other as adversaries. Approximately a half hour later they stopped sparring.

"Why are you here?" Aikio asked.

"I am here for you to train me," Midnite politely responded.

Aikio looked intently at Midnite, then said, "I ask that question because you are much more advanced in fighting skills than your age would suggest. You have been trained well. So, I ask again, why are you here?"

Midnite sat down crossed legged and thought deeply. He had many thoughts

running concurrently through his mind. *"How could he, or even should he, tell anyone even some of why he was preparing for a possible showdown?"*

Making his decision, he looked around the dojo.

He then asked "May we have a discussion in your office? I'm sorry, but this has to be a very private conversation."

Aikio understood. He knew this was an accomplished young man, a man that wouldn't waste time or energy on frivolities. He motioned for Midnite to follow him and proceeded to walk into his office. Midnite stood up entered Aikio's office, and shut his door.

"Do you have time to hear a complicated story?" he asked.

"Yes, of course I do," Aikio responded, "please, have a seat and get comfortable. I will get us some green tea and then we will proceed."

When Aikio returned with the tea, he sat down and said, "Now you may begin."

Midnite, slowly and as accurately as he could recall, told Aikio of the events and traumas of the past seven months, leaving out only those sensitive matters he had promised not to reveal, as well as his plans for the musical concepts he wanted to bring

forth to the public. He ended with the recent confrontation with Joey D. and his conversations with the Feds. Aikio was stunned by the narrative he had just listened to. There was a stillness in the room. Aikio had tears running down his face. Unapologetically, he brushed them away.

Looking intently at Midnite, he asked, “How old are you, Mr. Midnite?”

Midnite said, “Twenty, sir. I’ll be twenty-one in January. Why do you ask?”

Aikio stood up and came around his desk. He bent down and hugged Midnite, then he solemnly said, “You, my friend, are much too young to have endured what you’ve been subjected to; not only too young, but no person, no matter what age, should ever have to suffer a nightmare or the evil you have. Although many people have burdens in life that they have to be tested by, yours, my friend, appears to be caused by a higher power not of this world. Do you agree?”

Midnite also stood up. He was silent for a few minutes before responding. “To be honest, Aikio, I have always felt my musical talent was from the heavens. However, I’m not so sure about my tribulations. I haven’t been able to come up with a reason to justify what happened to me.”

Aikio smiled as he responded to Midnite's thoughts. "Sometimes we can't see the outcome of actions while they are occurring, nor even shortly thereafter. You are still young. Although you have many gifts, you don't yet have the life experiences that only the wisdom of age affords us. Time, coupled with trauma, has many functions, one of which is to present opportunities not presented by normal life. It is from these experiences that our path is made clearer, through opportunities that present themselves, opportunities that wouldn't ordinarily be available to us. For example, you explained to me your new life's mission of giving knowledge and a message of life through your music. I'm quite sure you wouldn't have had this epiphany if you hadn't endured this nightmare. Your life's path would be completely different; don't you think?"

Midnite absorbed the sensei's words of wisdom and his teachings. Finally, he understood how to put this aspect of his life into perspective.

"Yes, I understand completely. I can see that now, just as I can see that me walking into your dojo and meeting you will have a profound influence on my life. I have

a feeling we will have a very fulfilling relationship."

Aikio was pleased with his new student. "I will enjoy our time together," he responded. "I believe it will be an even exchange of knowledge and friendship. You see, my boy, you have things to teach me as well!"

Smiling, Midnite said, "Well, I don't know about that, but thank you, thanks for today. I made the right decision to enter your world."

They then worked out a schedule for Midnite's lessons, shook hands and hugged. Midnite left the dojo feeling quite euphoric. He knew when to savor rare moments like these. It had been a wonderful feeling letting his frustrations and pent up anger out during his sparring session. He looked forward to honing his skills.

Midnite hailed a cab and returned home. He noticed a car parked three houses down on the opposite side of the street.

"Hmm, probably Petrus' boys, at least I hope so," he thought to himself.

Just as he entered the house, the phone began to ring. He rushed over to the phone, picked it up and said, "Hello,

Carlos?" Ramirez laughed and said, "Damn, you're good. How'd you know it was me?"

Midnite said, "Well, there's not exactly a million people calling me, you know? So, what's up? Any good news for me?" Playing for time, Ramirez talked about things going on in New York, its music scene, who he had been in touch with, and the weather. Finally, he said, "Well, I might have some good news. Do you remember Don Martinez?"

Midnite's interest was piqued. "You mean the promoter, what about him?"

Ramirez continued, "He might be interested in setting up an audition after we have our personnel in place. He also, now this is a maybe, may front us some money, so we can get equipment and set up a house for us or work out a deal with the Marriot in Daytona. It all depends on the band. I talked us up quite a bit. I just hope we're as good as I made us sound."

Midnite's mind was racing. "So what does he want in return? How big a piece of us will he want? We'll obviously have to go slowly, step by step. I've seen too many promoters and record labels screw their musicians. I want to stay as independent as possible. My music, no our music will be its own vehicle," Midnite said with confidence.

“By the way, he continued, “have you ever heard of Derrick Morgan?”

“Are you talking about the monster bass player?” Ramirez asked. “Of course I’ve heard of him. I think he was touring with Paco Estrada’s band in Europe recently. Why, what about……wait a minute, you’re not sayin’ he’s coming on board, are you?” He asked excitedly.

“Well, he’s coming to Daytona about the same time you and Sunny will be here, you know, in what, a week and a half, or so. He’s very excited that you and Sunny will be a part of this whole thing. He really respects you, man. Do me a favor, though. Keep this to ourselves. If things don’t work out, it could be detrimental to us, not to mention embarrassing.”

Ramirez said, “Yeah, I gotcha. I’m getting excited, my man. I plan on getting to Daytona right after New Year’s, that cool with you?”

Midnite, of course, was happy to hear definite plans forming. “Very cool,” he said, “I’ll relay that info to Sunny and Derrick. I just have to figure out where you and Derrick can stay. I only have room for one person here at home and Sunny was the first to come on board.”

"No sweat, man," Ramirez said, "it's cool. I have some bread, so I can survive for a while. I have full expectations we'll be making beaucoup bucks pretty soon."

After they had hung up, Midnite decided to call Sunny again. This time he had success. He updated Sunny on all the new proceedings, especially about Derrick possibly joining up with them.

As they were hanging up, Midnite said, "Oh, I forgot to mention one little tidbit. Don Martinez is interested in us. There's a possibility that he might front us for a while, you know, until we get some gigs and attention from the fans."

"Well," Sunny said cautiously, "I think that's a good thing. However, I've heard both good and bad about him, depending on who you talk to."

Midnite replied to his cautionary words. "I can dig it. I basically said the same thing to Carlos. Although I would love a contract, and a label to back us, I don't want to give everything away before we even get started. We'll discuss this when we're all together, assuming everything works out between us."

Sunny told Midnite he would be returning during the first week in January to coincide with Ramirez's arrival.

After ending his conversation with Sunny, Midnite called Derrick. Cynthia answered his call. The two of them exchanged pleasantries, then Midnite asked if Derrick was around. Less than a minute later Derrick was on the line. Midnite gave him an update on everything that had transpired since their previous conversation. Derrick confirmed he would definitely be arriving in concert with Carlos and Sunny.

The following morning Midnite, once again, ordered a cab. He had the cabbie drive him to Paradise Studios. He was a little disappointed in their outward appearance, but happy with the studios themselves. The interior was quite nice, actually. He realized this was to be for rehearsing only, not for recording, so there was more latitude in that regard. After meeting the studio's representative and explaining his band's needs, he worked out a two-month deal. His band would be allowed to rehearse three times a week, at any time of day or night. Satisfied that that task had been accomplished, he decided to make a

detour before returning home. He broke into a jog and ran through downtown Daytona before stopping in front of Mike O'Rourke's building. Midnite walked into O'Rourke's office. Mike was surprised but pleased to see Midnite.

"Wow, I'm glad to see you. How have you been? Are you adjusting to normal life, or at least to what normal passes for in these parts?' he laughingly inquired. "Oh, by the way, I heard about Joey and the boys. This shit never ends, uh? Where do things stand? Update me, please."

Midnite presented Mike with all the pertinent facts of the past few weeks, pertaining to the legalities. He left out any information regarding his music or his recent foray back into the martial arts.

"So," Mike asked, "what brings you here? You must have a purpose. I know you don't do things just to pass the time."

Midnite tried to be light hearted as he answered.

"Well, Mike, my visit here is twofold. First, I feel as if I've never really thanked you for all you did for me, Marc and Deanna. I want you to know that I am aware of the risks you took. I mean, these people you were investigating were your former and present buddies. I can only

imagine what that must have been like for you. Secondly……"

Mike stood up, put his hands on his desk and said, "Whoa, hold it right there. There is a difference between friendship and what is right, not to mention what is the law. I smelled something funny going on and of course the fact that you had coincidentally disappeared convinced me, or rather inspired me, to delve seriously into this obscene labyrinth of a mystery. At the time, although I didn't know where the investigation would ultimately lead, I started seeing more and more that didn't add up. So, my true friends still are. The other cops I couldn't give a shit about. I sincerely thank you for your sentiments and for your courage and will always remember this as the highlight of my career."

Midnite liked Mike's attitude, his integrity and spirit. He had an informal yet no-nonsense air about him.

"You're a good man. I respect you," Midnite said, "Thanks. The second reason I'm here, however, is more serious. I need your advice pertaining to my recent encounters. The Feds said they will protect me. I know how these things transpire. They'll only be able to assign the personnel for a limited period of time, until something

more pressing comes up. Joey and his gang are on a vendetta mission. Simply put, they're out to get me. Now I can handle myself one on one, but I doubt that's how things will go down, when the shit hits the fan. I want to concentrate on my music, and would happily leave Daytona, but I'm more or less forced to stay around until I've given my depositions and whatever else the prosecutors will need from me."

Mike noticed Midnite's gaze looked like a bird of prey's intense glare before striking its victims.

"So, this is what enabled him to survive the atrocities he had endured," Mike thought. "He has an intensity that has the feel of genius, of seeing life happen before it happens. That's what is enabling him to plan ahead."

He now understood another aspect of Midnite's persona.

"So, what are you asking of me, exactly, Midnite? Do you want me to be your bodyguard, to keep tabs on things, to gather intelligence? What do you need?" Mike queried.

"Probably some of all the above," Midnite dryly answered.

O'Rourke stood up and walked towards the office door, peering outside his

office. Satisfied no one was near, he said, "I'm busy on two other cases at present. They're only divorce cases, so no sweat, but they do take up my time. I'll see what I can do. In the meantime, keep your eyes and ears open at all times. If I hired some of my comrades, it would start getting expensive, so I'll go solo for now. If we feel as though we'll need back up, we can address the situation then. Does this sound good for now? It's all I can think of."

Mike was pacing back and forth, from the doorway back to his desk and back to the door. Midnite asked him what was wrong.

Mike said, "I'm thinking, I'm thinking. Something isn't adding up. I mean, I get it about the honchos in the mayor and governor's offices. However, why would they let little shits like Joey and his ilk run the streets? Nobody would give a flying fuck about them. Something's not right. There's more to this than meets the eye. This must be even more involved than we thought. Do you have Petrus' business card on you? I want to call him now."

Midnite nodded in the affirmative, rummaged in his wallet, found Petrus' card and handed it to Mike, who immediately dialed the number on the card. When Petrus

answered his call, Mike started asking questions. Petrus quickly told him to stop talking on the phone. They agreed to meet in twenty minutes at Midnite's cottage.

At exactly the allotted time all three men arrived. They dispensed with the usual niceties and entered Midnite's cottage. O'Rourke asked a barrage of questions. Petrus was annoyed.

He said, "We are under an active investigation. Usually, I wouldn't be allowed to even discuss most of the salient points. However, I will break protocol in this case, because of the unusual circumstances and Midnite's inclusion."

He took a deep breath. "To put it bluntly," he continued, "This investigation is turning out to be much, much bigger than we initially thought."

Petrus looked at Midnite for a moment. "To date, we have two other states implicated, Tennessee and Kentucky. We are looking into others as well. Maybe now you can understand why we are moving slowly. As I said before, we don't want to blow this."

O'Rourke spoke up first. "Ok, ok, I get that. Holy shit, this is turning out to be huge, for sure! However, that doesn't

explain why that fucking rat Joey D and his perverted gang are walking the streets. I mean, they are low-level. Who'd give a shit if they were gone?"

Petrus responded frankly, "I was prepared for that question. Here's the deal. That stupid motherfucker may be the key to unraveling this whole thing. Before he died, Scirelli……," Petrus stopped and glanced at Midnite, "confided many things to DiGregorio. For example, Joey occasionally goes on trips out of state. Following him is what initially tipped us off. That's all the information I can give to you now, but we'll meet intermittently for updates. Any more questions?" he asked, as he stood up to leave.

Midnite said, "Just one. I'm putting together a band, I'm going to have musicians, managers, promoters, etc., coming to Daytona. I want to make sure we don't get harassed with traffic tickets for no reason or any other kind of hassle. What I'm asking for is round-the-clock surveillance or protection. Is this possible?"

Before Petrus could answer, he added, "Oh, I hired Mike here to help me out in the meantime, but he's only one man."

Petrus said, “Hold on a minute. Can I use your phone?”

He placed his call, stayed on the phone for a few minutes, then hung up and turned towards Midnite.

“All I can promise is that we can check in on you from time to time. We can no longer assign agents to you full-time. We’re so short-staffed, right now, that we’re forced to bring in outside help, specifically, agents from other jurisdictions. I’m sorry.”

Midnite was puzzled. “I thought you were keeping an eye on me and an eye on Joey, as we speak,” he said.

Petrus responded, “We still are keeping tabs on Joey, but like I explained, we can’t watch you all the time. I advise you to be vigilant and aware of your surroundings at all times. Oh and, don’t go anywhere alone.”

After Petrus and O’Rourke left, Midnite sat down on the couch to think and plan. His options were limited. On the one hand, he had to strategize all the necessities for getting his players together and all that that entailed. On the other hand, he feared that he might, almost unavoidably, run into Joey or his boys, whether by chance or design. Daytona was only so big.

Prioritizing his options led him to the conclusion that he would concentrate on putting his band together and simultaneously continue his Aikido workouts. This strategy would allow him to accomplish his two primary goals; playing music and staying alive!

That night, when Deanna returned home from work, Midnite asked her if she wanted to go out for dinner, as he hadn't prepared any food. She said she would rather go shopping and have a nice quiet dinner at home.

Midnite agreed. "Ok, you take a shower, put on some music, relax and get comfortable. I'll go shopping and surprise you with an awesome romantic dinner."

Deanna was grateful and said she would follow his sweetly motivated directive. Midnite decided to walk to a really good seafood, fruit and vegetable market he knew down by the boardwalk. It was a beautiful, moonlit, warm evening. He was amused when he saw all the Christmas decorations outside, especially the lit-up palm trees. He noticed the people in town and how they seemed to be happy and very courteous to one another.

"Ah," he thought, *"I wish people could act like that year-round, not just during this holiday."*

He greeted the workers at the market and joked around with them. He chose some live lobsters, jumbo prawns, cherry stone clams, asparagus, mangoes and corn-on-the-cob, and some chutney and curry ingredients.

"I don't know how I'm going to prepare this meal, but I'll come up with something tasty," he thought.

As Midnite started home, he remembered he wanted to pick up some flowers for Deanna and to brighten up their home. He stopped at a roadside florist and chose an unusual bouquet of tulips, combined with baby's breath and ferns. As he was paying for the flowers, he suddenly felt the hair on the back of his neck stand up. His sixth sense had kicked in. Midnite hurriedly finished his transaction, then walked about fifty feet to a more crowded area. He put down his packages and quickly spun around. Not ten feet from him were two of the biggest goons he had ever had the displeasure of seeing, especially this close to his body. He stared, they stared back. One of the goons took out a cigarette pack, lit up a cigarette and offered one to Midnite.

Midnite laughed and said, “No, no thanks. I hear they shorten your life.”

The other goon chortled and said, “Well, my man, I don’t think you’ll have to worry none about that, if you know what I mean.”

Midnite now got very serious, his focus became acute. “No, humor me,” he said, what do you mean? Please spell it out for me.”

The goon with the cigarette replied to Midnite’s sarcastic inquiry. “You want it spelled out? Your fuckin’ days are numbered, is all. You and anyone you know. Now do you fuckin’ understand?”

Unexpectedly, a voice came from the shadows. “Does that include me? He knows me, now doesn’t he? Hey, I know you two, don’t I? the voice drawled. “You’re those dumb fucks, the Goon Squad, known as Tweedle Dee and Tweedle Dum, no? I believe your names are Pete Franklin and Jimmy Logan. Very interesting conversation, you boys were just having. I know some Feds that would love to have a talk with you two morons,” O’Rourke said, as he came out of the shadows.

Taken by surprise, the Goon Squad didn’t quite know how to react. They started coming towards O’Rourke until they saw the

thirty-eight revolver in his right hand. "That's far enough, boys. Why don't you go run home to Momma Joey? I'm sure he's waitin' to hear from you"

They turned and pointed at Midnite, spat in O'Rourke's direction, spun around and walked away.

"Wow, was I glad to see you!" Midnite thankfully blurted out. "I wasn't sure how to handle that one."

Mike grinned and said, "Yeah, I've been keeping an eye on you, but I just happened to be downtown when I saw you walking down by the boardwalk. I was actually just coming to say hello to you when I saw the Tweedle brothers confront you. Things aren't good, Midnite. I'm really not sure you should stay around Daytona, no matter what the Feds want."

Midnite looked down at the ground before answering. "I hear what you're saying. However, things are a bit more complicated than me just up and leaving, as much as I'd love to." Looking up at Mike, he continued, "You see, as you know, I'm putting together a touring, and hopefully, recording band. I have three members coming to town within a few days. The Feds want me around to give depositions and it

would be, let's say, non-beneficial for me to leave at this time."

O'Rourke came closer to Midnite and placed his arm over his shoulder.

"We have a serious and life-threatening dilemma and I'm not sure how this is going to turn out. Nobody can watch over you all the time, not me, not the Feds, no one. Don't forget, we don't know who on the Daytona force is part of this, nor who the good guys are."

Walking side by side, both men were lost in their thoughts. Concern and friendship were commingled in O'Rourke's thoughts.

Out loud he said, "Listen Midnite, this goes beyond a job. I respect you as a person and I, uh, sort of feel fatherly towards you. I am deeply concerned and I feel frustrated. I mean this is a paradoxical situation. Although the law is on your side, in this case, they are not able to help you. I am also "on your side" but I feel inadequate in my ability to help you."

Although understanding O'Rourke's inner frustrations, Midnite simultaneously felt his own personal emotional conflicts.

"You're right, of course. I'm stuck in this seemingly endless nightmare. There is no right or wrong decision. Maybe I can't

see the answers because I'm in the middle of this situation. What would be resolved if I just up and left Daytona? I fear that one day when I come off a stage, after a concert, someone would be there waiting for me, you know, to do me harm. I can't live that way. I need the outcome to be decided here, in Daytona. My primary fear is that I'll have to kill again, in order to defend myself and stay alive. I don't want to have to be put in that situation. I never want to be forced to kill again, oh god, more than anything else in the world, I don't want to do that!"

O'Rourke had been listening intently to Midnite's concerns and realized Midnite was correct in his assessments. "What could be done to finish this chapter, this ongoing nightmare?" he thought.

"Oh, shit," Midnite exclaimed, "Deanna's waiting for me at home. I'm supposed to be making a lovely, romantic dinner tonight. Let's talk further tomorrow, I gotta go!"

The moment Midnite walked through the door, Deanna knew something had happened. The romantic evening was over before it started. Although upset, she worried for Midnite. She felt more compassion than anger.

"Now it's your turn to relax and gather your thoughts. I'll make dinner, you sit down on the couch and do nothing. I mean it," she forcefully but quietly said.

Midnite gratefully did as he was so lovingly instructed to do. After what seemed like five minutes to Midnite, but in reality was closer to forty-five, Deanna called him to dinner. Although she had prepared a succulent and beautiful feast, neither one of them had an appetite. This made Midnite both angry and sad; angry because, once again, people with bad intentions had interfered and changed his and their personal and private lives; sad because his life, now so intertwined with Deanna's, took away some of her innocence and therefore their closeness and intimacy. Deciding to drink some wine and go to bed, they cleaned up the kitchen and put the food away for another day. They held hands and talked well into the night.

They were awakened by the phone's incessant ringing. Looking at the clock, they both blurted out, "Oh, shit!"

Deanna exclaimed, "Oh no, I have ten minutes to get ready for work!"

Midnite threw off the covers and ran to the phone. It was Carlos.

"Hey man, I'm here, at the airport. How do I get to your house?"

Midnite was momentarily upset that Ramirez hadn't given him the heads-up on his arrival date. He realized he should get over that feeling and be grateful Carlos was here at all. He gave Carlos the address and said they would catch up when he arrived. Shortly thereafter, Deanna ran up to Midnite, kissed him on the lips and said, "Alright, baby, gotta go. I'll see you tonight."

Forty minutes later, Carlos arrived at Midnite's doorstep. After helping Carlos unload his luggage, three congas, and assorted percussion, they sat down to talk and catch up with their respective lives. Midnite felt better when Carlos explained he had called Midnite numerous times, but never got an answer, so he figured the best thing to do was simply to get on the plane. Midnite told him and then apologized for his initial reaction of irritation.

Carlos merely shrugged his shoulders and said, "Hey man, no worries. So, hip me to what's next. When are the others going to arrive? Oh, I'll be staying at the Holiday Inn, 'cause it's right next to the studio."

Midnite was relieved to hear that Ramirez had taken care of that annoyance. He had enough on his plate, as it was.

"So," Midnite asked, "What brings you here, what, a week early?"

Carlos explained that he had finished up his business earlier than expected and figured he could help Midnite set up the band, especially the managerial end. Midnite could then concentrate on the musical direction he wanted to pioneer. He went on to explain that he wanted Midnite to be freed up so he could write more songs. He felt that since all the music would be new, the band could pick and choose the most relevant songs to be played. Midnite welcomed Carlos' help and advice. He finally had someone close to him, someone he could trust unconditionally.

Midnite's mind was elsewhere, however, remembering his encounter with the Tweedle fools and the subsequent conversation with Mike. He made a sudden decision.

"Carlos, I want to run something by you and I want your honest feedback."

Carlos nodded in assent, though with a curious expression on his face.

Midnite continued, “I’ve told you some of the shit that’s happened to me, but what I haven’t yet revealed to you is that this is still, believe it or not, an ongoing dilemma.”

He went on to bring Carlos up to date on the most recent events.

“I’m telling you all of this because I need your advice on something. The other two players will be here after New Year’s. I need to clear my head. Christmas is in a few days. I’ve been seriously contemplating going to see my family in New York for the holidays. I need to get the hell away from here, to be surrounded by love and to heal myself from within. Now I feel bad because you’ve just arrived and I don’t want you to be alone for the holidays either.”

Carlos leaned back and laughed. for a while, shaking his head and saying, “Can’t believe this, oh, man, I can’t believe this. Listen,” he said, “I’ve been trying to figure out a way to tell you that I wouldn’t see you, well, maybe see you, but not be able to hang for too long, on Christmas day. My lady and my son are arriving on Tuesday, the day before Christmas, and staying until the following Sunday, or so. They want to be warm, instead of freezing up north. In other words, my man, no need to worry about me

and I won't have to worry about you. Merry Christmas!"

They hugged and laughed together, both feeling a huge relief along with an absence of guilt.

Midnite had concerns, *"Now, I just have to clear it with Deanna,"* he thought. *"Maybe she could come with me. I guess it depends on her job, or even if she wanted to."*

Soon thereafter, the two friends parted company. Carlos still had to settle in to his hotel room and Midnite tried to catch up with his chores, which had been on hold, due to Carlos' unexpected arrival. He sleep-walked through his chores, ate some lunch, and started composing the fluid melodies that were floating in his mind. His energies transposed his thoughts and feelings onto paper that soon would be launched out to the universe.

Deanna came home early from work, bringing Chinese take-out so they could relax at home for the night. Midnite was glad they were staying home so he could confer with her about his spontaneous plan to go north to see his family for the holidays. He explained his reasons to her, his need to

heal and to get away from the continuous negativity that pervaded his life in Daytona.

Her initial reaction was one of happiness. She could finally meet Midnite's family and see where he had grown up. Reality soon caught up with her initial joy, as she realized she was supposed to work from Christmas Day through New Year's.

"Oh, Midnite, this sucks!" she said. "I'll see if I can get out of work, but, you know, it's going to be almost impossible. I'm the only one who volunteered to work next week because I figured you would be busy putting together the band and I also thought we could use the money. Damn!"

Midnite was torn between his need to get away and his apprehension at leaving Deanna alone, especially during the holidays. Damn, nothing was easy!

"Deanna," he said, "I don't know what to do. I can't leave you alone, yet I need to get away. Once the guys get here, I won't be able to leave for a long time. Wait! Here's an idea. What if I left tomorrow and returned, say, next Saturday? At least then I could spend one of the holidays with you, New Year's is next Monday. What do you think?"

Deanna jumped up and kissed Midnite hard on his lips. "Oh, Midnite,

that's why I love you. You're always thinking of other people's needs. So, you're going to leave me tomorrow, heh? I'll just have to get mine now!"

She pushed Midnite down onto the couch and proceeded to unbutton his shirt. Jumping on top of him, she kissed him slowly, traveling down his chest with her tongue until she reached his navel. Her hands were busy unfastening his jeans when there came a knock on the door.

"Shit!" they both said for the second time that day. Midnite jumped up, buttoned his shirt and started walking towards the door. He stopped and turned towards Deanna.

She looked at him and said, "Don't worry, I'm outta here. I'm going into the bedroom. Don't be long."

She stuck out her tongue as she briefly showed him her breast. Midnite smiled as he once again turned towards the door. He cautiously opened the door and was relieved to see one of Petrus' men standing there.

"Sorry, man," the agent said, but you gotta come with me now."

"What's up?" Midnite inquired. "It's fucking nine o'clock."

The agent understood Midnite's concern and expressed his sympathy.

"I know, I know," he said, "but we have someone you have to identify. It's a fucking senator. We think he may have been funding some of the operation at Camp II and was also a, uh, a customer, shall we say? If you can't identify him, we'll have to let him go before the night is over. That's why it's so urgent for you to come right now. It's top secret and we gotta move fast."

Midnite stepped aside and motioned for the agent to enter the house.

"Ok, I get it," he said, "Let me tell my girl I have to go with you, now. Shit! I'll be ready in a minute"

Midnite reluctantly went into the bedroom and explained the situation to Deanna. She kissed and hugged him, but then turned over and put the covers over her head.

The agent and Midnite spoke very little on the ride to the precinct. When they arrived at the interrogation room, they were greeted by Petrus, five or six other assorted FBI agents and the Daytona police chief. The chief came over to Midnite, shook his hand and soberly said, "Mr. Midnite, on behalf of the Daytona Police Department, I

apologize for what happened to you, your friends and everyone who was falsely abducted and incarcerated. It is a dark time for our department and I wish to convey our heartfelt sympathies. I also want you to be aware of our intense and thorough investigation. Political pressure will not deter us!"

Midnite felt a wave of gratitude pass through his body. He shook the chief's hand and said, "You will never understand the relief I feel, hearing your words. I thank you, for myself and on behalf of the people that died here."

Petrus came over, placed his arm over Midnite's shoulder, winked at the chief and gruffly said, "Ok, boys, bonding time is over. Let's get to work."

Midnite had no problem identifying the senator. He was the angry man he had met when the warden had taken him to the restaurant. However, he could not truthfully say that he had seen him patronize the girls at the camp.

Petrus was upset. "Shit," he shot out, "ain't no crime meeting you at a restaurant."

Midnite looked at him. “What about some of the girls that were there, couldn’t they identify him?”

Petrus was agitated. “No, we went that route already. Some of them are in the waiting room. They don’t want to get involved,” he replied.

Midnite abruptly said. “Can you get me in touch with Lone Star? Is she in there? I might be able to convince her to get involved.”

Petrus walked over to Midnite and asked him, “Do you think it’s wise to do that. Won’t she associate you with the horrible things that happened there?”

Midnite smiled and explained that she had helped him with many aspects of his work and told Petrus of their special rapport.

“No worries, man, I’ve got this covered. Just let me see her, please.”

Reluctantly, one of the agents brought Midnite into a private room. A few minutes later, a female agent brought Lone Star into the room. The agent closed the door, leaving the two of them alone.

Lone Star brought her hand to her mouth and cried out, “Oh my God, Midnite! You’re alive! I heard you had been killed after you escaped. Oh my God, I can’t believe I’m seeing you.” She ran across the

short distance of the room and threw her arms around Midnite. “I’m so glad to see you, to feel you. Forgive me, I’m in shock, you know I think I loved you, I think I still love you!”

She pulled herself out of Midnite’s arms, intently looking at him, crying. She put her hand up to his face and caressed it.

“So tell me, what are you doing here? Why are we here together? Does it have to do with the senator?” she asked.

“Yes, it does,” Midnite answered. “I want to convince you to tell the Feds that you saw him at the camp, that he, uh, used the services. Tell them whatever you know about his visits.”

Lone Star looked apprehensively at Midnite, “I, I can’t do that,” she stammered. “Believe me, I want to.”

She leaned closer to Midnite and whispered, “Some of the guards came to my house, as they did to many of the prisoners that were with us. They wore black masks, came into my house, threw stuff around and told me that if I said anything to anybody, they would kill me and my family.”

“Ah, now I understand your reluctance”, Midnite gravely responded. “I’m going to get Petrus in here. Hold on a minute.”

Gently stroking Lone Star's hand, he added, "Trust me."

He put down her hand and left the room. He soon returned with Petrus, "Tell him, tell him what you just told me. Trust me Lone Star, I know what I'm doing."

It took her a while to respond. She did so, reluctantly but with determination. Petrus listened. His face turned beet red and he pounded his fist on the desktop.

"Those fuckers are scared; they have a lot to lose. They have everything to lose, their entire warped lives. They're desperate."

"Yeah, desperate and very dangerous!" Midnite exclaimed. Then he inquired of Lone Star, "Did the senator see you today? Does he know, that you are here?"

"No," she replied, I saw him through the two-way mirror. He was already there when I got to the precinct."

"Yes, that's right," Petrus chimed in. "Where are you going with this?"

"He wouldn't know who identified him, so Lone Star would be safe. They can't go around killing everybody," Midnite answered.

"Maybe. Maybe not now, but wouldn't I have to testify?" Lone Star asked.

"Can she do some kind of secret deposition?" Midnite asked Petrus.

"Well, that might work for the short term, but we'd need to eventually identify her during testimony in court."

"I want to crucify him, the whole lot of them, believe me!" Lone Star vehemently exclaimed. "They all deserve to be put away forever, but I have to think about everyone else too. Their lives are in danger as well. That includes me and Midnite, you know? Can you understand that?"

"Yes, of course I can," Petrus replied. "Give me a few minutes, I have to confer with our attorneys. I'll be back soon."

After Petrus left the room, Midnite listened to Lone Star's account of the many "visits" from the senator. She elaborated on which ladies he had been with, what he had done and who he had brought to the camp. Midnite asked her if she thought the other women involved would testify if the Feds could guarantee their safety.

"That's a tough one. You know what I mean, right? We all thought the nightmare had ended, and now this. Additionally, most of us have been intimidated, in one way or another. These are powerful men who have a lot to lose, so I don't know what to tell you. I'm scared. Be honest, Midnite. How the

fuck could they protect us, all of us? Do you truly think they would, for real, man?"

Before Midnite could answer, Petrus returned with two other men. He introduced one of them as an attorney, the other a witness protection agent. The attorney assessed the two individuals, looking from one to the other.

"Here's what we could do," he said. "I believe Bob over here could set up new identities for you two. We could get your testimony after relocating you. Would you be willing to relocate and change your identities?" he asked. Looking directly at Lone Star, he asked, "What about you?"

Lone Star was silent for a few minutes. The tension in the room was electric. Everyone waited, glancing at each other, shrugging in anticipation.

Finally, she said, "Yes, maybe, with certain conditions. "

"Such as?" the witness protection agent asked.

"I can choose where I'll live and you guys can convince me I'll live a normal life in a normal neighborhood. Oh, and set me up with a good job. I have many talents." Looking at Midnite, she asked him, "What about you? Would you come with me?"

Midnite looked at her, smiled and said, “I’m sorry, but I can’t. I can’t hide, I can’t run. I have big plans. I have to get my music out to the people. I have to perform in public. I won’t be able to accomplish what I have to being invisible.”

Petrus walked over to Midnite. “What if it were only for a short period of time, say three or four months?”

“Understand something. I’m not afraid to testify in court. These people have done unspeakable things to me, to us. I want to and I will make sure they come to justice. If you can’t do it, I will. I’m not giving them any more power over me. If you haven’t closed this chapter soon, I will go public and fuck all your politicians and powerful people. Tell your superiors they are the ones who have three or four months.”

“You realize,” Petrus angrily spat out, “if you do that, our deal is off. You’ll probably go to prison.”

“Yeah, I expected that response,” Midnite shot back. “Let’s see what happens. This is bigger than just me.”

The attorney interjected, “Hold on, calm down. There’s no need for all this. We’re all on the same side, here.”

Petrus exhaled and extended his hand to Midnite. “He’s right, I’m sorry. I know you mean well.”

“Me too, man.” Midnite shook Petrus’ hand.

Relieved, the attorney said, “Okay, let’s figure this out. If we’re willing to put them both under protection, allocating funds, setting up their lives, couldn’t we instead utilize those same funds to give Midnite twenty-four/seven protection? I think we could allocate and divert those same funds.”

The protection agent chimed in, “Yeah, it would still be under the same jurisdiction, I believe I could get that approved. Of course, there’ll be conditions.”

“Please elaborate,” Midnite said.

“You’ll have to give us depositions, then testify when the case gets to court.”

“Anything else?” Midnite asked.

“That’s basically it,” Petrus said. “Gentlemen, I thank you for your time. Please give us some privacy to figure things out.”

The attorney and agent shook hands all around and left.

“Let me work up some details and I’ll get back to you two soon,” Petrus

glanced at his witnesses. “Are there any other concerns or questions?”

“Yes, one,” Lone Star said. “What about all the others who had a visit from these monsters? What protections will they have?”

Petrus furrowed his brows in thought.

“That’s a good question. I think we’ll have to hope that Joey and the fellas will figure out that you’re missing and that Midnite is who he is. They are also under investigation, so I don’t think they’ll get too crazy. We’ll continue to assess the ongoing situation and make adjustments as we go along. I believe that’s the best we can do, for now.”

Petrus stood up to leave. “Come on, I’ll walk you two outside. However, let’s go out the back way. On second thought, Lone Star, stay and give us a statement. That will suffice for us to keep the senator in custody until he gets his attorney here and gets out on bail. Wait here and I’ll see Midnite out.”

“Hold on,” Midnite said, “I want to talk to Lone Star for a second.”

He walked over to her and whispered in her ear. She looked up at him and nodded. He kissed her on the forehead, then said “Okay, let’s go.”

As they walked down the hall, Petrus asked, “What was that all about?”

Midnite looked at him and winked.

“Oh, I get it. Renewing old friendships, eh?”

Midnite smiled back at him. In actuality, he had whispered to Lone Star to meet him at a certain downtown coffee shop tomorrow at noon. He had correctly surmised that she wouldn’t be in Daytona much longer and wanted to catch up with her in a more private setting.

Midnite walked outside and took a deep breath. He wanted to get home as soon as he could, so Deanna wouldn’t worry, but he decided to walk home and clear his mind. Reviewing the events of the past hour or so, he was somewhat satisfied. Knowing that Lone Star would be safe relieved his anxiety for her. He would be leaving for New York tomorrow evening and wanted to talk to her before he left town. He enjoyed the walk home. It was a beautiful late December night in Florida. Laughing to himself, he thought that tomorrow would be much, much colder up North.

When he arrived home, Deanna was in bed, reading. She jumped up when she saw him and asked how things had fared.

Midnite gave her a brief rundown, told her not to worry and asked, “So, where were we, before we had visitors?”

Chapter XII

(Music, Sweet Music)

Midnite met Lone Star at noon in a quiet secluded café. They sat in the back, where there were fewer people. Midnite sat with his back to the wall, facing the door, more comfortable when he could see who entered any room he was in, just in case! He and Lone Star talked for hours. She tried to persuade him to share their lives together. Midnite told her that she could always contact him for help. They would figure out a way to accomplish that even if she had to disappear because of the witness protection program. She finally gave up, not because she understood, but because she knew it was a hopeless task. They hugged and held each other tightly before saying good-bye.

Looking out the airplane window, seeing Earth from above, Midnite gleaned a different perspective of life. He had fleeting thoughts of how miniscule one's problems were, how insanely we lived. Yet, when back on the ground, those miniscule problems were once again all-encompassing. Perspective, a funny thing!

Midnite was glad to see his family. It was a family tradition for Midnite and his sisters to meet at Mom and Dad's house for the holidays. They enjoyed catching up with their lives. Seeing grandchildren, nieces and nephews gave all of them a heartfelt gratitude for life and its goodness. It was, in a sense, a brief interlude, a respite from the rigors of everyday life.

A few days later, Midnite announced that he would have to bow out early, as he had to prepare for the band's arrival in Daytona. He also told them about Deanna and that he didn't want to leave her alone for another holiday.

That night, his parents and sisters called him into a secluded area of the backyard, wanting to have a private conversation. They asked him question upon question about his abduction, how he had survived, and the details of his life up to that moment. All in all, they were not very happy with his report. They were worried about the path his life was taking. Midnite did his best to convince them that all would be okay, but his family didn't quite believe him. He had a hard time believing it himself.

As his father drove him to the airport, Midnite once again tried to allay his dad's fears, knowing his father, as a man, would be able to explain to Midnite's mother and sisters. His father knew that his son could take care of himself, but worried about the breadth and complexity of the situation, as well as the depth of corruption and greed that was involved. It was a tearful, bittersweet farewell.

After landing in Florida, Midnite hailed a cab, gave the driver his address, relaxed and started up a conversation. He enjoyed the light banter with the cabbie as he mentally prepared himself for the next chapter in his life, his musical life.

As soon as he arrived home, he called Carlos to see what he had missed while he was away. Carlos told him that his wife and daughter had left that morning, so he would be free to get together and strategize. Midnite and Carlos agreed to meet at the studio. Time was running short, as Sunny would be returning soon and Derrick was due to arrive within a few days. His next call was to Deanna at work. He told her he was home and looking forward to seeing her later that night. He gathered up his charts, ordered a cab and left for the

studio. Midnite brought his guitars, to do sound checks before actually playing in the studio. Arriving before Carlos, he sat down and played, listening to himself. He had the technician play back his musical experiments. He was not content with what he heard, so played again and yet again. Finally, on the fifth playback, he was satisfied with his sound. At the end of that, he heard clapping. Looking up, he saw Carlos leaning against the door.

"Hey, man. How long have you been here?"

"Oh, long enough to hear each improvement. You're your own worst critic. Any one of those takes would have been good enough."

"Well, you know me better than that," Midnite said, "Good enough…. ain't good enough."

They spent the next four hours strategizing, working up songs and adding lyrics. Finally, they were satisfied. Carlos said good-bye and left. As Midnite packed up his charts and guitars and prepared to leave the studio, he heard footsteps outside the studio room. He warily waited for whoever might appear. No one came into the studio. Midnite was contemplating whether

to wait where he was or to go down the stairs to see who was there. He decided to wait, not moving. His hands were confined holding his charts and guitars, putting him at a disadvantage if there were any confrontation. After some intense minutes of waiting, he grew tired of the suspense. Silently putting down his musical possessions, he cautiously peered outside the room. Just as he was feeling satisfied that no one was there, he spied a shoe sticking out from a recessed doorway.

Midnite clapped his hands sharply together, then growled, “So, show yourselves, I know you’re there. What do you want?”

Tweedle Dee emerged from the shadows. “What do I want?” he said, “Oh, just to let you know I’m here, always watching your ass.”

“Yeah, I had the feeling you were gay, just can’t help yourself, huh?” Midnite mockingly replied. “I prefer ladies myself, but to each his own! Tell your miniscule-minded boss he should confront me alone and not send his baboons after me.”

While he was taunting this huge man, Midnite was sizing up his opponent. Although he was big and muscular, Tweedle Dee moved slowly and stood awkwardly. He

didn't appear very bright. Midnite knew he would have a better chance if he could move an outright assault into an open area. A close encounter in the hallway would give Tweedle Dee more of an opportunity to grab him. Tweedle Dee became enraged and moved towards him, "I'm gonna get you, you fuck!" he shouted.

"Come on, get me," Midnite yelled, as he side-stepped and ran past the angered beast of a man, jumped down the stairs into the lobby, turned around and waited. Tweedle Dee was right behind him, charging like a maddened rhino. He swung a roundhouse left, but Midnite ducked down low and countered with an uppercut to his opponent's chin. As Tweedle Dee's head snapped back, Midnite used a ridge hand to his adversary's throat. The man grabbed his throat, gasping for breath. Midnite's inclination was to break a leg or arm, but held himself back.

"Next time, you won't be so lucky," Midnite calmly said. "Next time I'll continue. Tell your compadres their time is near, I'm really, really tired of this shit! Tell Joey if this happens again, I'm coming for him. He's nothing but a fucking coward, a greedy, stupid coward. Now get the fuck out of here and go home, like a good little boy."

Tweedle Dee looked at Midnite with fear and bewilderment as he ran past him and out the door, still clutching his throat.

Midnite went back upstairs, gathered up his music and instruments and walked outside. Looking around, he surmised things were quiet and safe, and decided to walk home instead of waiting around for a cab to arrive. Upon arriving home, he took a shower and felt relief as the grime, fear and sweat of his encounter left his body.

After bathing he placed a call to O'Rourke. He explained what had occurred and asked if O'Rourke could keep better tabs on him. They bantered for a while and came to the conclusion that for a request like that, Midnite would have to notify him of his schedule, where he would be, and when. Midnite said he understood and would comply.

Deanna was due to come home soon. Midnite decided not to tell her of his recent skirmish. She worried enough and he wanted them to have a pleasant evening together, free of any disturbances. Sure enough, she arrived home shortly thereafter. They had a pleasant evening together, drinking wine, eating cheese and crackers,

and making plans for the next night's activities, New Year's, 1977!

New Year's was great. Deanna and Midnite went to dinner, walked around Daytona and met Carlos before midnight. After the festivities, Carlos went back to his hotel and Midnite and Deanna returned home. It had been a fun and uneventful evening. Now Midnite only had the band to deal with. He refused to worry about his predicament, his ever-present albatross. He needed a clear head. "*What will be, will be,"* he told himself.

Two days later, both Derrick and Sunny arrived. Midnite took them, Carlos and Deanna to The Schooner Restaurant, an upscale seafood eatery. Midnite wanted Deanna to be a part of this initial, but important meeting. He felt she would understand his life and motivations better, as well as becoming an integral part of the next chapter of his career.

He observed the interplay among the men, as well as how they interacted with him. So far, everyone seemed to enjoy each other's company. He did notice, however, that Sunny and Derrick had a somewhat

stand-offish attitude towards each other, sometimes even throwing barbs. He would have to keep an eye on that situation. After much laughter the conversation took a serious turn.

Derrick looked at each member, then said, “Okay, here’s the deal. You guys all know each other, and have played together, or at least you all have played with Midnite. This seems really cool and all, but, to me, it’s still just theory. I haven’t heard any of you play.”

“Okay, I hear you, I understand,” Midnite stated. “Let’s rectify that. It’s what, 9:30 now? Everyone go to your digs, get fresh and let’s meet at the studio at 10:30. Everyone good with that?”

“That’s what I’m talkin’ about,” Derrick said. He pushed his chair back, stood up and was walking out the door when Midnite called to him, “Uh, Derrick, don’t you want to know where the studio is? Talk to Carlos, I’ll go pay the bill.

Sunny stood up and said, “I anticipated this, Midnite, so I set up my drums in the studio. I figured things woulda got kinda tight at your house.”

"Good, good thinking. Thanks for that," Midnite responded. "Alright, everybody, get going, I'll see you there."

Midnite and Deanna took a cab home. He had the cabbie wait while he gathered up his charts, Stratocaster guitar, and wah-wah pedal. He wanted to get to the studio before anyone else arrived. Midnite was meticulous. He wanted, no, needed, his sound to be perfect, not because of other's judgements, but rather for his personal satisfaction. He heard how a song was to be played, how it should sound (in his mind) and what emotions he would bring forth to more accurately compose his creation.

He placed his stool strategically, facing the two other player's stools. He wanted them to face each other as well, but also face him on an angle. He not only wanted to hear how they played, but what kind of movements they generated while doing so. He set up Sunny's drum kit between and slightly behind Carlos and Derrick, then placed his guitar on his knees and waited contently.

All three players entered the studio together, exactly at 10:30. After saying hello or nodding at Midnite they plugged in their instruments and tuned up. "Gentlemen,"

Midnite started, “I believe this will be an historic moment for all of us. It will mark the beginning of a new sound, a new consciousness and a new direction. Music will be changed forever. Um, that is if Derrick likes what he hears.”

There was laughter and clapping. Derrick looked up and drawled, “Well now, let’s see if we’re gonna make some history!”

Midnite struck a loud and raucous chord. His colleagues came to attention. Midnite stared at Derrick, nodding for him and Sunny to lay down some rhythm. Carlos was ready. Sunny started an intricate polyrhythmic beat. Derrick smiled and joined in. Carlos played his beats in between Sunny’s. Midnite copied the rhythms, yet at the same time changed them into lead riffs, while simultaneously playing chords.

Suddenly, Derrick stopped playing. “I, uh, I, I didn’t hear what I thought I heard. My God, was that even possible to think of, yet alone play?”

Midnite laughed, “Man, I ain’t even warmed up yet!” Carlos and Sunny slapped high fives and were shaking their heads in disbelief.

“Man, we told you. I know it’s outta this realm of reality, but here we are. Midnite’s right, you ain’t seen nothing yet.

You just lay down that groove, give him a heavy bottom, give him space. It'll blow your mind," Carlos stated the facts, as he knew them.

The studio engineer came up to Midnite.

"Mr. Midnite, I'm not sure what happened, but when I was testing out your band's sound, somehow it sounded like there were two guitarists."

The band members were laughing until tears rolled down their cheeks. Midnite jumped onto his stool. "Gentlemen, our group will be called Euphrates, for Euphrates was the river of life, the cradle of civilization! It will be our mantra, to continue new fertile musical concepts, spilling out to nourish the peoples of the world."

Three weeks passed. Midnite's private life had been uneventful. His musical life was fast morphing into his life's dream. As the days went by, the players slowly became a family, a musical entity to be reckoned with.

Carlos was now ready to commence with his plans for Euphrates to be exposed to his many contacts with premier record

labels. He called a meeting to discuss details of options that were becoming available for the band.

"My friends," he began, "We have a few choices available to us. Obviously, the final decisions will be made by Midnite. However, he wants this to be a democratic process, so here goes. In a nutshell, we have three options. The first is a recording contract. There is one label that is very interested in us and unbelievably, another label called me just this morning. Secondly, we could tour as an opening act. You all know how rare that is, especially at this early stage of our parturition. Yes, gentlemen, we might have an opportunity to be an opening act for Isis."

Carlos let that sink in and smiled to himself, seeing the band's expressions of disbelief.

"Thirdly, we can continue to hone our sound, wait until we feel, as a unit, that we are ready to 'hit the road,' so to speak."

Derrick spoke up first. "I opt for the Isis thing. I mean we could practice and get our sound down, until that all comes about."

Sunny agreed and interjected, "Yea, I feel we would be better served if we wait, as far as recording, because a recording will

be forever. Let's wait until we are truly ready for that aspect of our pursuit."

"Here, here!" Midnite acknowledged, "I agree. I will have Carlos jumpstart our negotiations with Isis. As you know, that band is unique because it is an all-female band. In addition, they are riding the crest of popularity. It is a most opportune time for us to take advantage of Carlos' unique abilities to negotiate this deal. I mean, he has accomplished all this with only a snippet of one tape of us playing…. and your reputations, of course! Unbelievable!"

"Well," Carlos continued, "I did this without Don Martinez. We still have him as backup, if all else fails."

"I like that," Midnite nodded at Carlos. "I don't want to be beholden to anyone outside of our little family here."

There were murmurs of agreement among the band's members. Carlos looked around and told the members of the band that he would be flying out to L.A. to meet with Krystal Delaney, the creator and leader of Isis.

"Wow, you are one lucky man. She's hot!" they all exclaimed.

Carlos left a few days later. Euphrates continued to practice and put together an act, so the audiences would see symmetry and cohesion. The band knew that initially the audiences would need something, besides their playing, to stand out in their minds. Or so they thought!

Midnite's life was becoming normal. Finally, he had peace in his life. He was fulfilling his musical dream, and his home life with Deanna flowed, like a smooth, serene, joyous song. He hadn't had any intrusions from Joey or his boys, or the FBI. Occasionally he wondered what the status of the investigations were, but at the same time, he had no desire to voluntarily inflict that world upon himself. Unfortunately, sometimes, it happens anyway.

A few weeks after he had left, Carlos called to give an update on his negotiations with Krystal and Isis. He reported that it was starting to look like the collaboration would become a reality. Although Isis had heard Euphrates' tape, they would, of course have to hear and see the band perform before any final decisions would be made. The caveat was that Krystal wanted Midnite meet with her in L.A. If she liked what she heard, she

and her management would fly out to Daytona to assess Euphrates's musical performance and professionalism.

Midnite was pleased. The report was better than he had expected. He told Carlos to set up a meeting and he would fly out the following week. He wanted to shorten the timeframe and not waste time. Although he felt the band was just about ready, he knew it needed to have a definite gig to keep the flow and momentum going. When Midnite gave the news to Sunny and Derrick, they were ecstatic. It gave them new motivation and their playing immediately reflected that infusion of euphoria.

That night, after Deanna and Midnite concluded another night of making love, Midnite discussed the possibility of touring with Isis. She had mixed feelings because she knew if things progressed according to Midnite's plans, he would be touring and not often be home. On one hand, she wished Midnite success, but on the other hand, she felt selfish in her desire to keep Midnite to herself.

Conversely, Midnite understood her dilemma of loyalty versus need, because he had similar feelings and doubts. However, as

deep as his feelings were for Deanna, he knew he must fulfill his commitments and dreams. He thought more in the realm of his self-imposed agenda, to get his message out to the public, which was more important than his personal needs.

Midnite landed in L.A. the following Wednesday. A limousine waited for him curbside. Carlos was holding the rear door open. Upon seeing Midnite, he took a deep bow. Hugging Midnite, he swept his arm towards the open door, grinning broadly. Inside was Krystal Delaney. As Midnite entered the limo his first thoughts took him by surprise.

"Her photographs don't do her justice," Midnite observed. *"She is a knock-out!"*

Her attire was classy yet seductive, mirroring her personality. She had a bottle of red wine in one hand and a glass in the other. Carlos and Midnite sat across from her. Krystal handed the glass to Midnite, put her finger to her lips and motioned for quiet. She gave Carlos two glasses, filled them and put down the empty bottle. Carlos handed her one of the glasses.

"Cheers, gentlemen," said Krystal "To new and successful beginnings."

Patting the seat next to her, she motioned for Midnite to sit next to her. He obliged.

"Well, now, ain't you the cute one! And you're a monster player. I don't know," she said, "maybe this will be good after all."

"Well, I want to thank you for this opportunity," Midnite gushed, "I'm sure me and the boys will……."

Krystal broke in, "Hush now, you don't have to sell the band. Carlos already took care of that. I want to know all about you."

The three of them talked and learned about each other's lives. Their conversation was easy and free flowing. Just before they reached Krystal's mansion, the conversation turned serious. Krystal stared at Midnite.

Finally, she said, "Here's the way it's going down."

She turned towards Carlos, he nodded his head.

Facing Midnite, once again, she continued, "We will go into my house, you'll meet the band, hang out for a few hours, get refreshed and have fun. Then we'll get serious. I want you to play with me and the girls, to see what you can do with us, I mean only musically, of course," she smiled. "I have a modest recording studio in

the basement. I want you to know, ahead of time, that we will record our first encounter. This will enable us; you, Carlos and Isis, but mostly me, to judge what we sound like. It will be an objective listen, to enable us to truly evaluate if we will be compatible."

"I don't understand," Midnite cut in, "Why does it matter what we sound like? I will be playing with Euphrates, not with Isis."

"To be honest," Krystal replied, "I heard the tape Carlos made. If you play like that, if that wasn't a fluke, I may have other plans for you."

"I'm not too sure I like where this is going. I have put together a mega band. More than that, I am creating my own sound, with my own thoughts, my messages. I don't mean any disrespect, but sorry, no"

Krystal tossed her head to the side and laughed. "That's exactly what Carlos said you would say. He knows you pretty well, huh?"

"We've known each other for a long time, yes," Midnite coolly replied, as he sipped his wine.

Krystal winked at Midnite, "I appreciate loyalty. We'll continue this conversation another time. Now," she said light heartedly, "Let's rock and roll!"

Midnite and Carlos socialized with the L.A. crowd. Carlos knew many celebrities and introduced Midnite to the people he thought would benefit his friend. He was careful to introduce him to the type of people he thought Midnite would respect. Midnite had fun, but wanted to get to the business at hand. He enjoyed himself in spite of his desire to audition and see where his band would, or could "fit-in" with the Isis tour. Finally, it was time!

The women of Isis were very serious musicians, who were talented and beautiful and performed an intricate, yet sexy show. They warmed up with their signature song, entitled "A Beautiful Life."

Isis called Midnite onstage at the beginning of their second song. Midnite told their lead singer, Gabrielle, that he hadn't yet studied their songs. He turned towards Krystal and asked if they could run through their next song so he could listen to it. He was aware of the musicians murmuring throughout the band, but paid it no heed. Krystal complied with Midnite's request.

When they had finished, Midnite leaned into the microphone and said, “O.K., I’m ready.”

Gabrielle shrugged and snapped her fingers to create the tempo of the subsequent song. Isis did their thing. Midnite missed the opening, but joined in at the second measure. He played behind the melody for half the song, then after the bridge, decided to pick up the intensity. He played the melody, then created a lead from the drum’s rhythms, paraphrasing the bass lines. His next lead was a mixture of all three. Towards the end of the song, but before the song was finished, Krystal signaled the band to stop playing.

Midnite, almost shyly asked, “I’m sorry. did I do something wrong?”

He looked around the room, to see everybody staring at him. Gabrielle ran over to Krystal. They whispered back and forth into each other’s ears.

Midnite started packing up his equipment.

“I’m sorry,” he said, “I just felt that was the right thing to play. I guess you didn’t. It was what I felt.”

Gabrielle jumped back onstage and told Midnite to follow Krystal. Krystal ran out of the room and into her office. Midnite

gathered his equipment and followed her. He entered her office and she motioned for him to sit down across from her desk. Midnite felt confused. Had he really played that badly? He felt like a child in the principal's office.

Krystal's face was red; she was crying. She actually stammered out, "Midnite, I don't know how to say this, but….."

Midnite stood up, "No need," he said. "It doesn't have to be awkward, I'll just leave."

"Leave, what the fuck are you talking about? You ain't going anywhere. You think I'd let you get away from me? You crazy?"

"I don't understand," Midnite sputtered, "I thought you guys, well, think I sucked, so I should just leave."

Krystal looked intently at Midnite, "Listen carefully. That was the most beautiful virtuosity I, or the band, have ever experienced. And I have seen and played with the best of the best. You're not of this world. What you did back there," she hooked her thumb towards the stage, "was not human, not possible. Your guitar was an extension of you, your emotions, your

thoughts. You took it all beyond physical restrictions. Wow, is all I can say!"

Midnite slowly sat back down. "Oh," he smiled, "I guess I misread the band. The way they were staring at me, I just thought I had fucked up, big time."

"I want you, Midnite. I get what I want. I want you to be my lead guitarist and I want you to be my personal friend," she smiled.

"You'll have to wait on that. Your offer is very tempting, but I'm covered in both those areas."

"Come on, Midnite," Krystal shot back, "I'll pay you ten percent of our gross revenue. You could make ten thousand a night. Does that change your mind?"

"I like you," Midnite countered, "You're talented, beautiful and very persuasive, but I have my own plans and my own friends, as you say. So, let's cut to the chase. Does Euphrates, sight unseen, tour with Isis…….. or not?"

Chapter XIII
(The Tour)

Midnite and Carlos flew home that night. Carlos had, in hand, a signed contract from Isis to Euphrates, as their opening act for a world tour commencing in one month.

"We have lots to do, lots to prepare for," Carlos reiterated for the tenth time.

"I know, I know," Midnite laughingly replied, "Relax, we'll get everything accomplished and on time. I can't wait to tell Sunny and Derrick the great news. I'm still in shock. I thought I had blown the audition."

"Blown it," Carlos let out a loud whistle, "the only thing you blew was their minds."

The next morning, Midnite and Deanna were strolling down by the beachfront, looking for a restaurant, when Midnite heard his name being called. Turning towards the sound, he saw a well-dressed gentleman approaching.

"Hey, Mr. Midnite, wait up, please. I need to talk to you."

Deanna and Midnite exchanged glances. Midnite shrugged, as if to say he

had no idea what this was about, nor who this person was. As the man approached closer, Midnite noticed a revolver on his waist, partially hidden under his jacket. The man nodded at Deanna and stuck his hand out for Midnite to shake.

Midnite looked at his hand, but asked, “Who are you and what do you want?”

The man put his hand down. “Nice looking girlfriend you have there, she’s a real looker Bet she keeps you happy, huh?”

He leered at Deanna and winked at Midnite.

“You’re getting off to a very bad start, mister. How’d you know my name? Kindly keep your observations to yourself, I don’t like what I just heard from your mouth”

“Oh, we all know your name, Deanna’s too,” he drawled, “now we just want you to know something I’ll think you’ll be interested in. I have a proposal for you.”

He indicated for Midnite to take a few steps away from Deanna. After they moved a distance away from her, the mystery man grabbed Midnite’s arm in a vise grip.

Leaning over, he whispered, “I have an offer, from some of your “friends.” They are willing to deposit the sum of one million dollars into your bank account within one week of your agreement to our terms and offer. One week! Think of it, one million dollars! Your life will change.”

Midnite stared at this delegate of death. He knew what was coming next.

“And if I don’t accept?” he asked

“Well, let’s just say your girlfriend over there, you, maybe Marc or even Mr. O’Rourke, may not be found when and if you arrive home from touring, capiche, paisan?”

Midnite glanced at Deanna, then back to this fool. He was momentarily stunned that “they” already knew about his tour plans. Placing his arm around “Mr. Capiche’s” shoulders, Midnite reached under his jacket with his free hand and deftly removed his sidearm. Capiche didn’t realize it had been lifted.

“So, you know, paisan,” Midnite coolly responded, “my friends are bigger and more powerful than your friends. My friends would never, ever, let someone steal their gun, nor let this happen to them. This is a forewarning, from me, to your people.”

Capiche looked down, felt for his gun and realized it was gone. Although Midnite rarely lost his temper, he was now infuriated. Taking a half step back for increased leverage, he swiftly and accurately placed a side kick midway to the left thigh of Capiche's leg. He immediately fell to the ground, his leg numb from a ruptured nerve.

Deanna let out a small scream and backed away even further. Midnite motioned for her to move back.

He turned around and yelled to her, "Go now! Get O'Rourke, now, Deanna!"

Deanna took one last look at Midnite, turned around and ran as fast as she could. There was a crowd starting to form. Midnite reacted quickly, knelt down, next to Capiche, took off the man's belt, threaded his wrist through one end, pulled it tight while concurrently wrapping the opposite end around his neck. Midnite then tied it into a tight knot, behind the man's neck. Midnite thought he looked like a stuck pig. *"Apropos analogy,"* he thought, tucking the revolver into his waistband and under his shirt, hiding it from public viewing.

Meanwhile, Capiche was enraged. "You don't know what you have done," he bellowed, "Untie me, now!" He was sputtering and embarrassed. His face

became redder and redder as the realization of his predicament became clearer. The crowd was growing, the people curious and worried. Midnite sat, cross-legged, just out of reach of Capiche's free hand.

"What the fuck did you do to my leg, it won't move. I fuckin' can't move it."

"Aw, shut up, you baby. It'll get feeling back in a few minutes. Think of it as a moral equivalence for your recent, and, I'm sure, not so recent, activities."

Capiche looked up at Midnite and said, "Huh?"

Midnite was about to respond again, when he spied Deanna returning with O'Rourke. Mike quickly assessed the situation, looked around and walked over to a nearby phone booth. He had a short conversation, then returned to Midnite and his captive. Midnite surreptitiously handed Mike the man's revolver. He didn't want to have to explain why he had the gun. O'Rourke told Midnite he had called the cops and that he should be prepared to justify the details of what had just occurred.

O'Rourke started laughing, shaking his head in disbelief.

"Only you could take down a huge baboon like that guy and have him looking like a stuck pig."

Midnite smiled, “That’s exactly the same analogy I came up with,” he laughed.

Shortly thereafter the police arrived. As Midnite was giving details of the incident to an officer, another sedan pulled up. Out jumped Petrus. He showed his credentials and said. “Alright boys, I’ll take it from here. Just book this guy,” pointing at Capiche, “and I’ll be down to the station to retrieve him as soon as I’m finished here.”

Turning back to Midnite he said, “Come downtown later and tell me exactly what happened. I must say it looks pretty interesting.”

“I don’t know if interesting quite covers it,” Midnite poignantly sighed, “but, ok, I will. Give me some time, I have to talk to Mike and Deanna. I’m sure she’s disconcerted, to say the least!”

“Ok, man, I gotcha.” Petrus shook hands with Midnite and nodded good-bye to O’Rourke and Deanna.

“C’mon you two, let’s get out of here,” Midnite indicated for them to leave, right away.

A week had gone by since the incident on the street. Midnite and the band were making preparations for their upcoming tour. They were finalizing their

routines, music and wardrobes. Tomorrow they would run through their musical set. Although the band members were exuberant, Midnite was quiet, reserved and brooding. He too was happy that his life's plan was about to take off and become a reality. However, he was worried about Deanna being home alone without him to protect her. The afternoon of the incident had prompted him to request Mike to temporarily move in to his cottage while he was on tour. Mike would drive Deanna to and from work, or wherever else she needed to go. Knowing this helped his state of mind, yet at the same time he knew there were a few times when he had had to face his nemesis alone, even though he had hired Mike to "watch over" him.

He had gone downtown after his lunch with Deanna and Mike to meet with Petrus, as requested and apprised him of his situation, his tour and Mike moving in to protect Deanna. Petrus didn't want him to go on tour. He thought the timing was bad because of all that was going on. Midnite informed him that it was going to happen in spite of everything.

The following weeks were hectic. Euphrates continually practiced. Don

Martinez showed up and he was impressed with what he saw. Carlos had a few meetings with him, but no deals were made, primarily because Midnite wanted to wait and see what kind of response they would receive from their tour. He had enough on his mind and wanted no further distractions.

Meanwhile, Deanna was not happy. She was scared and unsure of life in general. She dreaded the day Midnite was to leave. Midnite tried to reassure her everything would be quiet, that the "bad guys" were only after him. Although he had acknowledged her fear and understood her anxieties, it hadn't helped much. The pressure was mounting. It wasn't only Deanna's dilemma. He also had to keep the band members happy, prepare all aspects of the tour, coordinate schedules, as well as deal with Petrus, O'Rourke and Krystal. Carlos was a help, but in the end, it all fell on Midnite's shoulders.

"Ladies and gentlemen, the first band is new to the scene. This is their national debut. Without further ado, please welcome……Euphrates."

As the words fell from the M. C's mouth, Midnite's thoughts raced to the

previous days his band had played for Krystal and Isis. They were in awe of Midnite, of Euphrates, as entities to be reckoned with. Krystal actually confided to Midnite that she worried that Euphrates would eventually overshadow her band. Privately, Midnite agreed with her, but he would never utter those thoughts out loud.

The audience started chanting, “We want Isis…we want Isis”

. When Euphrates took the stage, the chant continued. Midnite knew he had to capture the audience from the start. He had anticipated this and the band was ready. Midnite started out slow and low, but within a few bars his guitar was wailing, crying and emitting pure emotion. The percussion section was keeping a simple backbeat, until Midnite hit the stratosphere. Sunny and Carlos started trading licks as Derrick played in between their syncopation. The four talented and innovative players were soloing, but in sync with each other at the same time. The audience was captured; it was mesmerized.

When Euphrates ended their set, the audience was silent for a minute. Then the crowd roared their approval, with cries of,

“More, more. Please give us more!” Euphrates returned to the stage for an encore.

Midnite stepped up to a mike, “Thank you, we appreciate you. This is our first public appearance and we are very nervous. If ya’ll will excuse me, I think I want to sing. I think we’ll play a song I call ***Sands of Time.”***

Midnite spun around and nodded to the band. Euphrates started playing a melancholy bluesy ballad. Midnite stepped back up to the mike and sang;

“Emerald green glades
With yellow hues

Deep burning
Thru the sun’s glare

Peeks out amidst once darkened embers
Of shining flares

Screened love……don’t care
Only little children ever dare

Old, sticky, once a youth
Now you quote, “Forsooth, forsooth”

Candied dreams fallen by the wayside
Pick ‘em up & dust them off

Yea, pick thine own ass up off the floor
& hang your picture world on the wall!

Mirrors of the soul reflect through your eyes
Past pain stimulates the other’s lies

Colors get forlorn
Rich hues die

Rainbow creations on hold
For now, even your emotions are sold

Ecstatic love of a forgotten age
Another chapter with no last page

Unspent emotions in love’s last grips
Still, I crave the sweet nectar from your lips

Listen to the hush……

Everything is still……...

The quiet lingers like the ocean's foam
Covering the sands of time"

The crowd, as a unit, a force, instantly became devotees. It was an amazing phenomenon to behold; musical history in the making.

After the gig, Krystal asked Midnite to meet her in her dressing room. He entered, sat down on her couch and asked, "So what's up? What'd you think?"

Krystal looked at him intently. Then without warning, walked over to the couch and sat on his lap, her face close to his, very close. Before speaking she kissed him on the lips.

"What do I think? I think you, and Euphrates will be a super group within a year. I think you'll be a superstar by yourself, no matter who you play with. I think I want you, now."

She started taking off her blouse before Midnite could react. His mind was racing, expeditiously analyzing his options, as she threw her blouse on the floor. She unbuttoned his shirt while fumbling with his

pants. She was moaning and crying out, “I love you, I love you! I want you so much.”

Abruptly Midnite came to. (His senses?) “Whoa, whoa, hold up,” he forcefully said, as he pried her hands from his body. “Listen, I find you very, very attractive. You are hard to resist. I’m sure you know that. You’re famous and beautiful, can sing your ass off and you’re a pretty good guitarist,” he joked. “But we have a business relationship, I have a great woman, who I care for deeply, and you and I will be on tour together for a long time. Even if I didn’t have a girlfriend, I think we’d be better served if we were just good friends. So let’s be friends; what do you think?”

“I think that sucks!” She exclaimed. “I have different priorities than you, that’s for sure. You may not know it yet, but you’ll be mine one day. Maybe not today, maybe not tomorrow, but soon enough.”

The weeks and the tour flew by. Germany, England, Japan, Sweden and France all had ecstatic receptions for Euphrates. Krystal had been prophetic with her fear of Euphrates overshadowing Isis. Unfortunately for Isis, it became evident early on in the tour. By the time they started their third week of touring, the crowds were

chanting for Euphrates, not Isis. The newspapers were brimming with acclaim for Euphrates. However, within the reviews of Euphrates there was also an inordinate undercurrent of praise for Midnite's virtuosity. Midnite's talents were so enormous that the musical world was fawning over itself to meet, greet or be near him.

Carlos, the prodigious professional that he was, adeptly kept Midnite buffered from the majority of intrusions. He was also quite accomplished at getting Midnite to meet with the who's who of the musical world. Carlos' talents shone the brightest with his ability to pair Midnite with musical giants of like-minded individuals, those that were socially aware and brought messages of unity and awareness to their fans.

The weeks that followed were a whirlwind to Midnite and Euphrates. They were the toast of the town, wherever they went. Midnite had invitations from many of his musical heroes, as well as from non-musical mentors. It was a mystical, profound time, full of unique opportunities and unforeseen events.

All was quiet back home. When Midnite had recently called the house, both

O'Rourke and Deanna reported that all was calm and nothing out of the ordinary had occurred. Life was normal. This news gave Midnite great peace of mind, enabling him to fully concentrate on the prodigious matters at hand. He would resume that chapter when he returned home.

His next call was to Petrus. He wanted an update on the status of the investigation. Unfortunately, the news was not good. Everyone, from the governor on down, was still out on bail or not yet indicted. Petrus explained that additional details were being gathered from the two neighboring states as well, in order to fully cement their case, with as many witnesses and testimonies as possible. His estimation was that Midnite should hold tight because, in his analysis, indictments were imminent. Midnite was not thrilled with this report, but told Petrus he understood. Petrus congratulated him on his phenomenal success and after an awkward silence, told him he was proud of him. Midnite hung up, happy he knew Petrus, but unsatisfied with how the investigation was proceeding.

"Till another day," he thought to himself.

The tour was to return to the States, partially for a short break from their hectic schedule, but primarily to tour the United States, for their exposure had been only in Europe and Asia.

Midnite wanted to go with Carlos to New York, to visit with family and to negotiate with recording studio execs, as he had numerous lucrative offers from them. Midnite figured he would stay in Daytona for the duration of their "rest," to spend some much-needed time with Deanna.

They flew into JFK airport in mid-March, on a windy, cold and snowy night.

"Man, I forgot about this weather, Daytona spoiled me," Midnite complained to Carlos. "We have to get on the train to mid-town, and I sure don't want to be out here freezing."

Carlos laughed, "You are forgetting you're a star now, bro'. Check this out."

He waved to a limo sitting by the arrival platform. As they got into the limo, Carlos continued, "See, no freezing for you, compliments of BMG records. They'll be the first record company you'll be meeting with, tomorrow, at uh," Carlos thumbed through his black book, "at 11:00 am tomorrow. That cool?"

"Yeah, real cool," Midnite laughed, sat back on the oversized seat and immediately fell asleep. Midnite had fitful dreams. He dreamt of his life over the past few years. Leaving Kathy and Chris in New York, his time in Boulder, his arrival in Miami and then Daytona. He smiled when his dream brought to life his meeting Deanna. The good memories continued, until the dream morphed into a nightmare, recreating his abduction. He screamed and woke up in a sweat.

"Whoa, bro', it's alright, it's a dream. Everything's cool!" Carlos said as he held Midnite tightly.

Midnite looked around at his surroundings, then at Carlos. Satisfied he was in the limo, he whispered "I'm okay, now. Wow, that was realistic, shit!"

There was a pit in his stomach, but attributed the feeling to his nightmare. Something would not let go, however. He had a feeling of dread of unknown origin, more than what had been caused by his dream.

Midnite and Carlos had four meetings with record companies. They met with executives from BMG, Arista, Capitol and Virgin Records. It was a heady time.

Nonetheless, Midnite was not satisfied with their recording offers. He felt he would have to give up too much of himself for them. He wanted to keep Euphrates' creative independence, but felt the record companies wanted Euphrates to make too many concessions that pertained to their creativity and royalty stream. They wanted Euphrates to be more mainstream and not as "out there" as they felt the band was. Midnite politely explained that he would have to discuss all options with his group and get back to them.

When Midnite and Carlos left the last appointment, they discussed the intricacies of the prior days' meetings and discussions. Deciding to continue their conversation over dinner, they settled on the Carnegie Deli on 7th avenue. Boy, did Midnite miss a good pastrami sandwich, with pickles and knishes and a chocolate egg cream!

"You know, the companies all sounded the same. The theme is identical with all of them. Be safe, be formatted, be like everyone else, that's what sells. I'm going to have to do what Hendrix did and build a studio like Electric Ladyland, in order to have my independence. I guess the

hard part is distribution. How does one get the word out to the public?" Midnite rhetorically asked.

Carlos was vexed, "I totally agree. None of them listened to you, to your need for getting your message out, nor what your musical talent encompassed. They only wanted to fucking have you play bubble gum pop music. Are they kidding me? Don't they hear your talent? I don't get it!"

"The corporate mentality of the bottom line, is all that freaking counts" Midnite was irritated and frustrated. "Well, we're going to continue touring, until the public outcry demands my music. Then the corporate heads will sing a different tune."

Carlos laughed, "I'm certainly glad you're so confident. I agree, however. It'll force them to listen closely to your music and thus your message."

The two friends parted ways. Carlos went to check on his apartment and catch up with his New York life, while Midnite left for Long Island to visit with family. They planned on staying in New York for four or five days and then head back down to Daytona. Derrick and Sunny were to return in two weeks. The American tour was to commence mid-April. Midnite wanted to

change some things around, particularly, removing some songs and adding others. He had written some new material and wanted to try it out on the band, to get their feedback and ascertain how it fit into their act.

Midnite's visit was both relaxing and familiar, two aspects he had been sorely missing in his life. His family was proud of his achievements, but their greatest joy was that the negative flow of his life seemed to have disappeared, or at least abated. Fame and fortune were good, his family surmised, but their primary concerns were Midnite's health and general wellbeing. That's why Midnite loved them so much. They had taught him the best values in order to prepare for life; his parents' priorities had been well-entrenched into his very core.

Deanna was waiting for Carlos and Midnite at the airport. After their affectionate greeting, Deanna announced, "I have a surprise for you! Bet you can't guess what it is!"

Midnite just stared at Deanna and stopped in his tracks.

"No, silly, I'm not pregnant," she said. "Don't you think I'd be showing more

than this? I mean you've been gone for how long?"

Relieved, Midnite asked her if she had a taxi waiting, but she just winked.

"Go get your luggage and I'll meet you out front."

After retrieving their luggage, Midnite and Carlos were waiting outside, looking for Deanna, when they heard a car horn. Deanna pulled up in a new BMW 320i.

She jumped out excitedly, "So what do you think?" she asked. "I used the money you were sending home. Now you won't have to call a damn taxi every time you want to go somewhere. I hope you're not mad with me."

Midnite was taken aback, Carlos laughed, looked at Midnite and turned his head, mouthing, "Uh, oh. Holy Shit!"

Midnite shrugged his shoulders and said, "I get it! Uh, do we have any money left in savings?"

Deanna giggled, "You're kidding, right? Do you have any idea how much money you've sent me? This car isn't even a drop in the bucket."

"Well then, let's get in and enjoy ourselves. We'll have the rest of the luggage sent home." Midnite and Deanna caught up

with what had been going on, making plans for the week and enjoying each other's company.

After dropping Carlos off at his hotel, they returned home. Deanna pulled into the driveway and Midnite got out and retrieved his duffle bag from the back seat. He was about to open the front door to the house when he noticed a piece of paper stuck in the doorjamb. He picked it up and unfolded the small paper. His face turned red as he read the message. "***Enjoy each other while you can!***" Midnite looked towards Deanna, who was just leaving the car. He quickly folded the paper and stuffed it into his pocket. He didn't want her to worry; he'd do enough of that for both of them.

Later in the evening, as they were having a quiet time, watching television and drinking wine, Midnite blurted out, "Listen, babes, I want you to come on this leg of the tour with me. You don't have to work anymore; we have more than enough money now. What do you think?"

"Wow, where did that come from? You never mentioned anything about that before. What are you thinking?"

Midnite shrugged, “I dunno, I miss you when I’m gone, you know?”

“Let me mull that one over. You hit me with that one out of nowhere, but I like it.”

The next day, Midnite called a meeting with Petrus and O’Rourke. They agreed to meet in O’Rourke’s office around noon. Midnite enjoyed his new car, especially liked the freedom it afforded him in not having to wait for a cab. He silently thanked Deanna.

Midnite arrived early at Mike’s office and showed him the note. “These fuckers know everything I do: my schedule, when I’ll be away or home. I think there’s a fucking mole in the bureau.”

Mike let out a sharp whistle. “Holy shit, you could be right. The only people who should have that information, besides the band and promotors, are me, Deanna and Petrus. Damn!”

Petrus casually breezed in a few minutes later. He was about to greet them when he noticed the expressions on their faces. “What? Did I do something?”

Midnite handed him the note and explained the circumstances of where and

when he found it. He then verbalized his suspicions. Petrus was silent, internally assessing the possibilities of Midnite's accusations.

Midnite cut into his thoughts. "I mean, think about it," he said, "that Capiche guy, you know, the guy I tied up by the boardwalk, knew about my tour, about Deanna, O'Rourke and even Marc. How the fuck else could that group have access to that kind of information?"

Petrus waved his hand in dismay, "I know, I know, you must be right. Fuck, damn, I need to think this through carefully. I'll have to review all my orders, who received them, who I talked to and who knows what about you and this entire investigation. Excuse me, gentlemen. I have lots of work to do!"

Petrus stood up and practically flew out of the office.

Midnite left O'Rourke and went directly to visit Aikio. His sensei was more than happy to see him. They bowed and embraced. Aikio appraised his student. "You have been doing quite well for yourself. Come, I have something to show you."

They went into his office. Aikio opened a drawer in his desk and took out a

scrapbook. The pages were filled with Midnite's accomplishments, reviews, pictures of Euphrates, their interviews and even accolades from Isis, especially Krystal's comments.

"My intuition tells me this one likes you," Aikio said, pointing at a picture of Krystal.

Midnite smiled, "Yup, something like that."

"So, my friend, what brings you here to see your humble servant?" Aikio modestly inquired.

"Many reasons, my sensei. I acknowledge my need for your wisdom. I've been confused about where my road is leading me. My journey is unclear. I haven't had a chance to work out lately and I miss it terribly. I want to stay in shape and keep both physically as well as mentally sharp. And there's this."

He handed Aikio the note. Aikio frowned as he studied the abhorrent paper.

"Your evaluation in the creator's eyes continues," he murmured. "The greater your challenges, the greater the rewards will be. However, you'll need guidance. You'll also need help, more than what your investigators and law enforcement will be able to provide, I would think."

Midnite spoke next. “Help? I understand the guidance part, but who can help me, if not the police, or the FBI, or myself?”

Midnite peered into Aikio’s eyes inquisitively.

“I will help, my friend. Myself and some friends. It has been discussed, it is overdue. There has been a criminal illness here for far too long. Many people have suffered.” He slammed his hand on the desk. “Enough!”

Midnite bowed, “Excuse me, sensei, but your ignorant servant doesn’t understand.”

“Let us exercise and spar. That will clear our minds and bodies. Then we will talk,” Aikio said, as he handed Midnite a karategi, (or gi, as it is called in America).

“Today we will use weapons.”

Aikio worked Midnite hard. They sparred using full contact. They tested and worked each other’s limits. Aikio taught Midnite different techniques, which employed more efficient and thus quick ways to subdue an enemy. Aikio honed Midnite’s weaponry skills. Aikio’s lesson utilized a bo, or staff, for close contact, when someone is outnumbered in an open area. They worked with nunchakus, two

handled weapons, joined together by rawhide or chain, for close contact in confined areas. Midnite was already quite proficient with shuriken, or throwing stars, used primarily to slow down an enemy. They worked out for eight hours. Although they had taken fifteen minute breaks in between sessions, to drink water and let muscles rest, they had not stopped all day,

Aikio tested Midnite's fortitude and mental stamina, as well as his physical limitations. He passed all the tests. Aikio was impressed, yes, even amazed at Midnite's mental toughness, his profound ability to improvise and make immediate changes, when necessary. Aikio now understood how Midnite had managed to survive so well in captivity.

After their workout, Aikio had one of his staff bring in dinner. As Aikio and Midnite settled in, they returned to the business at hand. Aikio explained what he had put off earlier. He went into a long dissertation about the state of affairs in Daytona. His people were frequently harassed, threatened and manipulated by the Daytona police. He and his friends had tried legal means, filing lawsuits, sending letters to their state representatives and conforming

to the sometimes bizarre demands from law enforcement. All had been to no avail. Recently, the representatives for the police had “requested” monthly payments for protection, basically, from themselves. He explained that the people who were threatening Midnite were the same.

Midnite broke in and explained exactly how deep the thread of fear and death ran. He expounded upon his earlier descriptions of his life at the internment camps and what had occurred after his escape. He informed Aikio of the harrowing and dangerous criminal path that led all the way up to the governor’s office, further elaborating about the payoffs, the free labor and prostitution, and the intimidation of the primary witnesses. He confided in Aikio in ways that he had with no other, not his family, not Deanna, not O’Rourke or Petrus.

“So, what are your thoughts on how to proceed, to put an end to this?” Midnite asked. “Keep in mind, there’s an active investigation by the FBI and the Daytona Police Department. The Justice Department also has an investigation happening, although I don’t know to what extent they’re involved,” Midnite stated.

Aikio was thoughtful. “We didn’t realize it went quite this deep, and was so involved. That does put a different slant on things. Our initial plan was to “take out” the responsible parties, first by striking back, physically, then using more drastic measures if deemed necessary. They are responsible for killing or maiming twenty-two of our family members.”

“Well, if people start disappearing, even these bad players, someone will notice,” Midnite wisely determined. “Maybe if we strike back with force, one at a time, guerilla style, we can return the intimidation and fear. In and out, so it can’t be determined who we are. I’m sure they have many enemies to choose from. It’s primarily their foot soldiers, the lower echelon of their hierarchy, that intimidate and use force. How many people can you gather, who would be willing to be engaged in this sort of warfare?” Midnite pointedly asked. “As an option, we could, although I don’t like this thought, capture some of their foot soldiers and glean information from them. I know exactly who we could start with!” he vehemently exclaimed.

“That is one tactic. However, I have another plan as well, one a little less conspicuous at first. We will gather and

make public their leaders' dirty secrets. We are in the process of gathering "dirt." It will be damaging evidence on the governor and mayor. I think they will be quite busy defending themselves."

That night, when Midnite returned home, he placed a call to Lone Star. He gave her a synopsis of his conversation and plans with Aikio, and asked her if she had any relevant input, or knew of anything that might help their stratagem. Lone Star informed him that she might have an interesting answer to his queries.

"When prominent customers came to the camp," she explained, "we usually had them go into our "special" room. In that room we had a hidden video camera. What I'm saying is that we have video of almost everyone that entered that room."

"Including the governor and mayor?" Midnite excitedly asked.

"Yes, and many, many others."

"Who has those tapes now?"

"Do you remember Eleanor?"

Midnite scoured his mind, then snapped his fingers. "Wait, wasn't she the woman that brought me a beer and also gave me the guitar I played on the first day I met everyone?"

"Wow, you're good. Exactly, she's the one."

"Can you get in touch with her? How the hell did she get the tapes out of the camp?"

"Yes, she's still a friend; we keep in touch. As far as how she got the tapes out, her husband works for the company that picked up the guard's dirty laundry. She periodically handed the tapes to him and he smuggled them out."

"Excellent!" Midnite passionately replied. "How soon can you get your hands on them?"

"Hold on," she replied, "I'll call her now, then call you back."

Midnite waited impatiently by the phone. After what seemed an eternity, Lone Star finally called back. "How soon can you get here?" she asked.

"Give me your address, I'm leaving now."

Midnite beeped the horn when he arrived at Lone Star's house. She ran out and jumped in his car.

"Wow, nice ride, man. I guess you're doing alright, huh?"

"Well, the tour went well, yes," Midnite humbly replied.

"Oh, Midnite, I'm so happy to see you again. I've been following your career in the papers, I'm so proud of you!"

She leaned over and kissed him on the cheek as they took off.

Eleanor and her husband met them on their front porch. At their feet was a good sized box filled with tapes. Eleanor ran up to Midnite and hugged him, hard.

"Midnite, it's so strange seeing you here. You know, we're free now. The amazing thing; it's because of you that we're free."

"I appreciate that, Eleanor, but it's because of my friends that you're free. Their endless efforts, detective work and perseverance is why we are all standing here now and not in that god-forsaken place."

"No matter, you're my hero. Take these tapes and put those bastards into hell, where they belong," she vehemently cried out.

On the ride back to Lone Star's house, the atmosphere was electric with excitement. They discussed all the possibilities of how to proceed, as well as the endless outcomes of this previously-unforeseen path.

As Midnite was dropping off Lone Star, she turned to him and asked him to come inside.

Before Midnite could answer, she put her finger to his lips and said, “I ask this favor. Please come inside. I may never see you again. I want you with me just a little longer. You wouldn’t be here now if I hadn’t told you about the tapes. I know you’re here only because of that, not because of me. So please, Midnite, I beg you, do this for me.”

Midnite knew, in essence, that she was right. He suddenly felt guilty and obligated. Although reluctantly, he complied with her request.

She had a cute, cozy little house. They sat by a fireplace, and continued their conversation. Lone Star got up and poured some wine. Midnite studied her carefully and “saw” her clearly for the first time. He had always thought of her as a fellow inmate, so she had been a cloudy figure in his mind. Now, he saw, she was quite beautiful, had an alluring body and a very down-to-earth quality about her. For the first time he acknowledged to himself that she was a very beautiful Native American woman. For the first time, he saw her clearly outside the confines of the walls he had built

up in his mind, pertaining to everything and everyone he had been in captivity with. She handed his glass to him and sat down next to him.

She saluted with her glass and said, “Drink up, my dear. This is a celebration.”

“Oh, and what are we celebrating?”

“Many things. Me, you, hopefully the downfall of those pricks at that place of horror, our freedom, but most importantly, me knowing you. I’ve never known anyone like you before and I’m sure I never will again. Excuse me for a moment,” she demurely said.

Midnite finished his glass of wine, got up and poured another. He was about to sit back down, when he heard a soft rustle. Turning towards the sound, he was stunned by what he saw. Lone Star was in a lace negligee. It was provocative and alluring. Very alluring.

Midnite mumbled, “Uh oh.”

Lone Star came closer, grabbed the wine from Midnite’s hand and sipped it suggestively, while staring intently into his eyes. As she placed the glass on the table, she took his hand and placed it on her breast.

“Please,” she whispered, “do this for me. Pretty please,” she said in a throaty whisper, “See, I’m asking nicely.”

Images of Deanna whirled through his head.

"I'm sorry, I can't," he managed to say. He noticed his hand was still on her breast. Lone Star continued to look directly into his eyes. She removed his hand from her breast and placed it between her legs. He immediately felt her heat, her wetness.

"You're not making this easy for me," Midnite gasped.

"That's my intention, my love, that's my intent."

She unbuttoned his shirt and slowly worked her way down his chest with her mouth. Undoing his belt, she looked up at him, smiling and silently mouthed the words, "Thank you."

Driving home, Midnite tried to rationalize his actions, to no avail. Although he had enjoyed Lone Star, he felt guilty and annoyed with himself and definitely not sure how to handle it, going forward. Midnite was about to turn into his driveway, when he abruptly did a U-turn as he decided to go to Aikio's dojo instead. He parked in front of the dojo, grabbed the box of tapes and went inside. Aikio was in his office. Midnite entered, sat down and pointed to the VCR player, sitting on his shelf.

"That work?" he asked.

"Yes, it does. Why, what's up?"

Midnite opened the box, took out a tape, looked at the label, and handed it to Aikio.

"You're looking for dirt, get out your shovel."

Aikio looked at the label with the governor's name on it, let out a sharp whistle, looked at Midnite inquisitively and put the tape in the VCR. It was very incriminating. The tape showed the governor drinking scotch, smoking marijuana, undressing one of the ladies, tying her up and viciously pummeling her while he was inside her. Over the course of the next two hours they reviewed the entirety of the tape haul. They had enough incriminating evidence, on a majority of the major players of the Florida, Georgia, Tennessee and Kentucky legislatures, to proceed with their plan. Now they just had to figure out what their plan was to be.

"So where do we go from here?" Midnite inquired. "Let's lay out our options. If we go immediately to the press, the FBI or police, we'll lose our edge, our upper hand."

"I believe the first thing we should do is make three copies of each tape. One

copy for me, one for you and one to present to our friends in government," Aikio rubbed his hands together. "This is good, disgusting but good."

"Yeah, but before we let them see these tapes, we have to evaluate our objectives. What, precisely, do we want them to do? What is our end goal?"

Aikio didn't immediately respond. When he did, he had his hand on his forehead, thinking carefully about what he was about to say.

"I want restitution for the families whose people were killed, thrown in jail and otherwise harassed. I want our people, who are in jail through fraudulence, to be released immediately."

"Well," Midnite cut in, they'll know immediately who is blackmailing them. There may be some desperate measures taken against you and your people."

"Yes, that is true. The same would hold for your endeavors, no?"

"Of course you are correct. We have to be very careful, Aikio. Do you think we should get O'Rourke involved in this somewhat, ah, illegal endeavor?"

"From what you've told me about him, I think maybe yes. He would more than likely know better how we should proceed,

you know, how to accomplish this in a way that we would have the most autonomy."

"Ok, assuming we hire him and he gets the tapes to the appropriate parties, how do we get them to, one, leave us alone, two; accomplish what we're after and, three, get them arrested for impropriety and being accomplices, or proponents in illegal and immoral activities, but, more importantly, paying for, you know atone for, being complicit in God knows how many ruined lives and deaths."

"Those are all important and valid questions," Aikio agreed. "I think we have to speak with Mr. O'Rourke, no?"

"Yes, Hand me your phone, please. I'll call him now. After I finish speaking with him, you call who you have to, to get professional copies of the tapes made. In the meantime, I'd suggest you keep them in a well-hidden, secret location."

Midnite gave Mike a synopsis of their plan. Aikio was to get the tapes copied the next day. The three men were to meet in O'Rourke's office the following afternoon.

Chapter XIV
(Retribution?)

Midnite was worried. The tour was to begin its U.S. campaign in a few days. He not only had to prepare for that, but figure out, working in tandem with Aikio, how to best utilize their unforeseen bonanza. Additionally, he had to contend with his inner emotional upset, caused by his dalliance with Lone Star. Sunny and Derrick would meet up with him in San Francisco, where the tour was to jump off. He was relieved that Sunny no longer had to live in his house, not wanting to be secretive with his plans and motivations.

On a spur-of-the-moment decision, he decided to spare Deanna the knowledge of his assignation, figuring he had enough emotional baggage on his plate and Midnite didn't want her to deal with any more contentious subject matters.

Deanna was still not home when Midnite arrived. *"That's odd,"* he thought. *"Oh, well, maybe she had something to do after work or was hanging out with friends."*

He looked at his watch. It was eleven fifteen. She was usually home, even if she

was hanging out, no later than eleven o'clock. At twelve thirty he got in his car and went looking for her. She wasn't in any of their usual hangouts. In the little bar and grille, where they sometimes ate a late night dinner, he spied one of her co-workers.

"Hey, Sammie, how's it going? Have you, by any chance, seen Deanna today?"

"Sure, man. She left work when her shift was over, I'd say she left at nine thirty, nine forty-five, the latest."

"Ok, thanks," Midnite shouted over his shoulder.

He got into his car and peeled out, tires screaming. "Shit," he thought, "I don't have anyone's home number. Fuck, fuck, fuck!" He wanted to find O'Rourke, or even Petrus. He wondered if he was needlessly panicking, or if his instincts were correct, that Deanna had been kidnapped, or worse. Deciding to return home, in hopes of his worst fears being negated, he was disappointed. She wasn't home, the house was deserted. He went to the fridge to pour himself a drink. The shrill ringing of the phone startled him. Then, a surge of relief poured through his body, as he figured Deanna was calling to tell him she was at a friend's house. The voice on the other end was not Deanna's.

"So, did you two enjoy each other?" the voice ominously asked.

Midnite's heart froze. He was being watched. The call came not five minutes after he had returned home.

"Where is she?" he demanded.

"Cluck, cluck, my little chicken, not so fast."

"What do you want?"

"What we want, my young cock, is to trade you for her. She doesn't mean shit to us, if you know what I mean, but you do."

"Put her on the phone. I want to hear her voice; I want to know she's ok."

"Sorry, no can do. You just show up, alone, no Petrus, no O'Rourke, no nobody, comprende? Tonight, drive down the beach to where the grove of trees is, in the secluded section, next to the campgrounds. Eleven pm, sharp, my friend. That is, if you ever want to see your cute, luscious little chickadee again, yum, yum." The phone abruptly clicked in his ear.

Midnite's mind was racing, going over and over the foreboding message, searching for clues. They wanted him in a dark secluded area. He would be alone and presumably outnumbered. He had no way to even know if Deanna was alive. This scenario couldn't be allowed to happen, not

the way they wanted! Looking at his watch he saw it was now two thirty. He ran to his bedroom, went to the dresser and removed his nunchakus and throwing stars from the drawer. Returning to his car, he placed the weapons under his seat, and drove away. Fifteen minutes later he arrived at the FBI's field office, in the hopes that someone would be manning the station. He saw lights on. Jumping out of his car, he ran to the office and violently banged on the front door. Nothing.

He continued to bang, shouting, "Open up, please open up!"

He heard voices within the office, murmuring. Finally, he heard, "Hey buddy, you drunk? Go home, get some rest."

Midnite pulled it together and as coherently as he could muster, replied, "I'm a friend of Petrus. I need him now, it's a fucking emergency. I don't have any way to get in touch with him, other than here."

The door cracked open. A face appeared. Midnite saw a gun in the man's hand, through the crack in the door.

Midnite backed away from the door, raised his hands in the air and said, "I'm sorry, I know this sounds crazy. I'm Midnite, part of a case he's working on. I need his help, now! Please!"

"Midnite, you say? Ok, hold on, wait right there. I'll call him, see what he says."

The door slammed shut. Midnite heard the deadbolt being secured. He waited impatiently for what seemed like an eternity.

Finally, the door re-opened. "Come on in, sorry about that. We get crazies coming here all the time, you never can be too careful."

"No worries, man. Were you able to get in touch with Pete, uh Mr. Petrus?"

"Yes, he said he'd be here in twenty minutes or so. Names Frank, Frank Noonan. Can I get you a coffee, soda or water, in the meantime?"

"Coffee would be great, milk and sugar, thanks."

Right on time, Petrus arrived. He shook Midnite's hand, nodded a perfunctory greeting to Frank and motioned for Midnite to follow him into his office.

"Shit, man," he said, "What the fuck. Tell me exactly what happened, what's the problem?" Midnite explained the night's events, his concerns and the trap that was being laid out for him.

Petrus was circumspect and deliberate in his response.

"Okay, the best way to handle this would be to get our men to the drop off area,

hours early. We will set up a military style operation, hiding like guerillas. Once we analyze the situation, after they arrive, we'll know how to react." Suddenly, he stood up. "Shit, I just remembered, most of our agents are on assignment. They probably won't be returning until it's too late for tonight's mission. Damn!" He slammed his fist on the desk.

"Frank, get your ass in here, now!"

Frank came running in. "Yeah, Pete, what's up?"

"How many men could you round up for an armed field run, by say, six o'clock tonight?"

"Tonight? No way. Our guys are away until, at the earliest, tomorrow afternoon. Maybe I could get, let's see, me, you and Tony," waving his thumb towards the agent in the other room. And Tony's never been in the field, why what's up?"

Petrus waved him away, saying, "I'll explain later."

Midnite looked up, "Do you know Aikio, you know, Aikio's dojo, downtown?"

Petrus glanced at Midnite with an incredulous expression. "Yeah," he said slowly, "Why?"

"He may be able to help. Why'd you look at me like that?"

"Well, Aikio and his people have been an enigma. They've asked us for help in matters of, uh, shall we say a certain criminal element in Daytona."

"Yeah, Pete, and it's the same element that we're after. It's all fucking connected. Didn't you already put this together?"

"Nooo," Petrus slowly let out. How do you know this? Are you sure?"

Midnite thought carefully before he answered. He had to answer honestly, but without compromising Aikio's trust in him.

"Twenty something of his people have been killed outright. Some are in jail, others threatened. Recently the local police have asked them for "protection" money; to be clear, it's protection from the police and their cohorts. So, yes, it's all connected. What the hell is going on with your investigation? You've been telling me for months that it's getting there, that you're making progress."

Petrus was exasperated. "I know, I know. We're up against very powerful and influential people. We are about to indict the warden and some of the guards from the camp, but we can't, as yet, indict the mayor or governor. We're still investigating the

administrations from the other states as well."

Unable to contain himself, Midnite blurted out, "You'll see some action on that front, soon."

"What do you mean, please explain," Petrus almost demanded.

"Sorry, not sure exactly how, but it will happen, I can and do guarantee that!" Standing up to leave, Midnite sincerely said, "Thank you for getting up in the middle of the night for me. I'm not trying to be mysterious, but I'll call you later and let you know how things turn out with Aikio."

"I can't let this happen in an official capacity," Petrus stated, as he winked, "Let me know the outcome of your meeting as soon as humanly possible."

Midnite drove to the other side of town. He decided to grab something to eat while waiting for Aikio to open the dojo, choosing a small restaurant directly across from the building. He was impatient, knowing there was no time to waste. Even if Aikio went along with his objective, they would still have to organize and plan out exactly how they would execute their strategy. Midnite was just finishing breakfast, when a shadow blocked the sun

across his table. Quickly looking up, he was relieved to see Aikio's smiling face.

"So, little brother, what brings you here?' he politely asked. "By the look on your face, it isn't good."

Midnite quickly explained what had happened and what he wanted, no, needed to happen.

Aikio ordered a coffee and a tea to go. Leaving the restaurant, they rapidly structured their strategy. Aikio was busy working the phones while Midnite contemplated their most advantageous strategy.

Aikio returned in short order. "We have seven warriors," he proudly proclaimed. "Three of them will be deployed to the meeting area, to do reconnaissance and find the best hiding places. They have two-way radios, so we'll get reports, especially if the other side decides to get there early."

"Ok, good. Excuse me," Midnite said, "I have to call Petrus."

Petrus was on standby and immediately answered the call. Midnite filled him in with the details of their plan

"Initially," Petrus explained, "I thought we could set up vantage points where people enter the beach, then close in

on the suspects, once we identified Deanna. Unfortunately, that's too out in the open. Three of Aikio's men are already at the sight. We'll have to send the other, let's see, four "warriors", as you call them, to the meeting area, well-hidden and early. Then there's you, Aikio, me and Frank. We don't know how many of their men will arrive. You can be assured they'll be heavily armed. Frank will be a homeless man, acting drunk. I'll be a fisherman, casting from the shore. Aikio can deploy his men, surrounding the general area. The trees will be perfect cover. You will come walking down the beach, so you appear to be alone, with no back up."

"How do we get Deanna away from them?" Midnite nervously inquired.

"Well, luck and instincts, I'm afraid. Theoretically, they should release her when you "agree" to go with them. Enough talk for now. I'm hanging up, so I can plan everything out to the last detail. We'll meet up at the dojo in, say, two hours at the most."

Midnite solemnly explained the evolving plan to Aikio, who was both amused and grateful that the FBI would now be on his people's side, when they had spent

the better part of two years trying to get a satisfactory response from this same entity. In any event, Aikio was happy just having a glimmer of hope, of a new beginning, in this regard. The two conspirators continued discussing their plan, waiting for Petrus and his men to arrive.

Just under the two-hour deadline, Petrus arrived. Midnite laughed when he saw Pete. He was dressed as a fisherman would be, complete with tackle box and fishing pole. Frank smelled and was dressed in rags. Midnite thought he looked (and smelled) the part, for sure!

Petrus took Aikio aside and had a brief but meaningful conversation. They made amends for past transgressions partially because Petrus actually apologized on the FBI's behalf. Petrus walked over to Midnite, handing him some wires and a microphone.

"We're going to wire you. We'll have a van on the beach with a recorder. Hopefully they'll say something incriminating."

Midnite took off his shirt and raised his hands, allowing Frank to secure the wire and microphone. Petrus went outside and raised his hand. The headlights of a white

van, parked across the street flashed twice. When he returned inside, he told Midnite to test the mike.

Midnite nodded. “Hello, you fuckers,” he said, “I hope this allows you to save my life later. Can you hear me?”

Petrus went outside again. He saw a hand with a “thumbs up,” outside the driver’s window.

“Okay, we’re good to go,” he said, “let’s move out.

Midnite went to his car and removed the stars and nunchakus, hiding them on his body and in his pockets.

When the entourage arrived at the meeting area, the three warriors that had been sent to the perimeter earlier couldn’t be found.

Petrus started getting upset. “See, that’s why I don’t like to use amateurs. Where are your men, Aikio?”

Aikio looked at Petrus and laughed. Petrus’ face turned red. Aikio whistled three times in rapid succession. The ground moved, a tree stump moved and some grass moved.

Midnite chuckled, “Did you say something about guerilla warfare? These guys are fucking ninjas!”

Pete looked at Aikio, “I’m sorry for doubting you; I’m impressed. I owe you an apology.”

“Serenity, confidence and inner calmness is the way of the warrior; which allows one to think clearly. Anxiety, fear and doubt erode the inner spirit, thus allowing wrong decisions and mistakes,” Aikio calmly explained, as he walked to where his men were hiding.

“Wow,” Petrus exclaimed, “I’ve been doing field operations for twenty years. I just learned something.”

With a sudden change of tone, he barked out commands.

“Frank, go to your spot, Aikio you and your men, find where you want to be. I obviously don’t have to tell you what to do.”

Then he did something he’d never done before. He bowed in respect. Aikio returned the bow, smiled, turned and left with his men.

Midnite melted into the crowd, by the boardwalk, while the agents and Aikio’s men took up their battle positions. At twenty minutes before eleven, four black cars slowly and systematically fanned out in the general area of the meeting location. Midnite waited until five minutes before

eleven, to commence walking from the beach entrance towards the specified location. As he drew near, the car's occupants exited their respective cars and slammed the doors shut. Midnite counted twenty men.

"Shit," he thought*, "that's more than I had expected. They're not taking chances. I don't see Deanna. I hope she's hidden in one of the cars, out of sight!"*

Midnight walked to the middle of the four well-placed cars. A nattily dressed man met Midnite, in the middle of where each car was placed, equidistant from each other.

"This is well-planned, with almost mathematical precision," Midnite calculated.

"Okay, Mr. Midnite, get in that car," he nodded at the car situated to Midnite's left.

"Whoa there, buddy, where's Deanna? I'm not going anywhere until she's free and clear of this place, you got that?"

"Listen, you little prick, you've been a thorn in our side for way too long. The warden should have killed you, like he killed the others, a long fuckin' time ago. Your little sweetheart is fuckin' sunk in the bottom of the ocean, that's where she is! The same place you're gonna be, when we

finish with you, but not before we get all your friends. Yeah, that includes your fuckin' FBI friend, your Mr. Petrus. He can't take fuckin' no for an answer. He's getting' too close for his own good. He'll be joining you and your girlfriend before anyone else"

"So, let me understand. Are you saying Deanna's dead? Is that what you said, you motherfucker?"

The man laughed, "Fuckin A, that's what I said, get in the fucking car, now!"

He started walking towards Midnite, drawing his gun. Midnite waited until he was five feet away, then threw a rock at the man. As he momentarily looked down, Midnite reached behind his back and in one fluid motion. whipped out the nunchakus and slammed one end into the man's skull. He instantly dropped to the ground. Without warning, there was pandemonium. Three men went down, as the "ninjas" came out of hiding. Petrus and Frank came running over with their weapons drawn, employing one of the cars as a shield. Petrus commanded the men to drop their weapons.

"This is the FBI!" he shouted, "You're surrounded, you'll all die if you resist."

The men were confused, unsure of what to do. Their leader was incapacitated. Out of the corner of his eye, Midnite saw Aikio and his men subduing six more of the "bad guys." He was amazed with the precision of their attack. Suddenly, he saw a man crouched behind one of the cars, aiming at Petrus. Midnite dug into his pocket, wrestling out his throwing stars. He threw two, in rapid succession. One pierced the man's shooting hand, the other, his throat. He dropped his gun and clutched at his throat. Midnite looked at Petrus, who smiled, nodded and saluted him with his revolver.

It was over as quickly as it had started. Four Daytona police vans pulled up. The officers gathered up guns and quickly hand-cuffed the gangsters, or so they originally thought. Seven of the "thugs" were recognized as fellow Daytona cops. Petrus and Aikio simultaneously walked over and stood next to Midnite.

"Do you think she's really dead?" Midnite despondently asked Petrus.

"We won't know until we grill these guys. Hang in there, buddy. We'll do everything we can to find out, I promise you. We also have more than enough tape

to convict that guy," he said, pointing to the unconscious man with the bloody head. "I'm quite certain we'll get these other assholes to rat each other out. I'm also told we have quite a contingent of dirty Daytona cops in that round up. We now have more than enough leverage to finally blow this case wide open."

They watched as the two men Midnite had injured were taken to the hospital.

Aikio put his arm around Midnite, but he shrugged it off and walked away. Midnite was worried, sad and angry.

"Was Deanna dead? Was she injured? Was she scared? If she's alive, I'll find her, I make that vow!"

He kept walking aimlessly until he remembered he now owned a car. He walked back to where his car was parked. Petrus and Aikio were waiting for him.

"You okay?" Petrus asked. "I'm truly sorry about Deanna. I hope that piece of shit was lying, you know, that she's still alive."

Aikio saw that Midnite was crying.

"Midnite, I am here for you, if there's anything you need, well just ask, anything."

Midnite looked at his two distinctly different friends.

"Thank you both, I thank you," he repeated. "I'm sorry, I have to go now."

Midnite drove away, not having anywhere in particular to go. He just wanted to be alone with his thoughts, with his guilt. He eventually drove home, poured some wine, smoked a joint and called Krystal.

"When you coming?" She asked.

"There's some heavy shit going down here. Do you think we can delay the tour for a while?"

"What are you saying? No, there's no way we can delay. Tickets have been sold, the venues are booked; no it's impossible. Carlos, Derrick and Sunny are all here. The tour starts in three days. Get your ass here, pronto."

Midnite demurred, then asked if Carlos were around. She put him on the phone. Midnite explained what had happened and why he needed more time. Carlos understood his dilemma, but still insisted he get to Frisco as soon as possible.

"Sorry, man," he said, "there's just too much riding on this, too many people involved. We'd lose credibility and probably face many lawsuits."

"Yeah, I get it," Midnite responded, "I thought I'd try; my heads fucked up right now."

He hung up, then immediately dialed the airlines to book a flight. After finalizing his travel plans, he called Aikio. When the sensei answered the phone, Midnite asked him if he could immediately come to his house. He wanted to set their plan in motion before he left for the tour. Then he called O'Rourke, explained what had gone down, apologized for not meeting him earlier that day, as had been planned, and asked him to please meet him and Aikio as soon as possible. Mike agreed.

A half hour later, the three men were sitting in Midnite's living room.

"Okay, Mike, as you know, we have tapes of all the major players, pertaining to the camps, tapes showing their complicity and depravity. What do you think is the best way to achieve our agenda?"

Mike thought carefully. "Well, we'll have to send a letter along with each tape, outlining our requests and expectations."

"Requests and expectations!" Midnite exploded, "No, no, no. We're not going to be nice about this. I want all the guilty parties to pay and pay dearly for their

transgressions. I agree we send the letters, but these letters will give them nothing but ultimatums. In other words, if what we demand to happen doesn't happen, we'll go public with the tapes. If Deanna isn't returned alive, if admission to their appalling actions isn't admitted, if they don't start squealing on one another, then we go public. We'll send tapes to the newspapers, to the news stations, to anyone else we can think of. I'm tired of playing around. I've reached the end of my patience!"

Aikio chimed in, "I want not only admission, but restitution for my people. I want to see heads roll, if not figuratively, then literally, god damn it!"

Mike looked at each man long and hard, as was his habit when contemplating serious issues.

"I get it, I get it. I'm going to go to each office myself and hand deliver each tape and letter. I will demand an audience with the cited individuals. I will judge their reaction. What time period will we give them to procure a response? I want to be clear when I write the letters. I will, of course, let you two gentlemen edit them as you will. I will have them ready by

tomorrow evening. How's it coming along with the tapes?" Mike asked Aikio.

"I picked them up on my way here. They're in my car trunk. I'll give each of you a copy when I leave. Midnite and I will keep a copy, I also have the originals and, Mike, you'll have the third set of copies to give to our illustrious adversaries."

Mike asked, What about Petrus? Shouldn't he be aware of what we're doing?"

"Not yet," Midnite looked at Aikio for agreement. Aikio nodded affirmatively.

"Why not?" Mike inquired again.

"He shouldn't be part of this somewhat nefarious affair, don't you agree? I think his integrity would be compromised. Hopefully, he'll have his hands full, mopping up this mess."

"Okay, I have another question," Mike continued, "How would you like our, as you say, "illustrious adversaries" to respond? Is there a number they'll call? A mailing address? Do you want them to call me in my office?"

"Shit, you're right. I didn't think about that! Midnite turned to Aikio. "What do you think? Any ideas?"

"I do think I know something. Within our community, we have an internal

postal and courier service. It's used mostly, and gentlemen, this is strictly confidential, it's used primarily by our business associates, in order to keep things private, or for transfers of money…. things of that nature."

"Okay, but why would this secret courier service help us "Gaijin" or "gweilo?"

"I'm impressed by you, once again, Midnite. The terms for foreign devil in both Japanese and Chinese!"

I figured the various Asian communities had the same opinions of us, is all," Midnite smirked and glanced at Mike.

"In answer to your question," Aikio stood up, "because I will ask them to. Gentlemen, you must excuse me. I have some urgent business to attend to."

"Before you go, one last question. How will our criminal friends get their answers to these couriers?" Mike asked.

"We just set up a time and place, which we'll demand our adversaries must conform to"

"Okay," Midnite queried, "but what about in different states? How can we coordinate those areas?"

"Oh, I wouldn't worry. We are a far reaching and powerful organization. I bid you a fond farewell, for now."

Midnite left for San Francisco the next day. He was glad to be away from the craziness, ugliness and sadness of Daytona. However, he had a pit in his stomach thinking of what Deanna's fate might be, or had been. He would have to immerse himself in his music, in the tour, as a catharsis for the evil events that had occurred. On the plane ride to Frisco, Midnite wrote a song about Deanna's influence on his life and of her death. In his heart, he knew, deep down, she was dead. He just knew it.

Midnite was glad to see his friends once again. Carlos was, as always, a true and dear friend. He consoled Midnite, without being condescending. Sunny and Derrick knew nothing of his private life and he decided to keep it that way. Krystal and the girls in Isis were very happy to see him again. The tour kicked off at a venue called The Winterland Ballroom. It had been a giant ice skating rink that had been converted to a rock concert hall a few years earlier.

Euphrates was about to exit the stage, when Midnite turned to the band and hurriedly took some charts out of his pocket and handed them out.

"Sorry guys, I have to do this."

He turned to the audience and said, "Please give us a few minutes. We have to learn a song I just wrote. It's called "***My Angel.***" It's dedicated to my one true love."

The band hesitantly started playing ***My Angel.*** They had a good feel and grasp of the piece by the third stanza. Midnite played a blues that mustered all his feeling for Deanna. He walked up to the microphone and sang his love's song.

And then I walked up to that lady
Whose loveliness gave my heart
A start!

And said, "Let's take a walk in the park
The sun's going down and it's gettin' dark
The rainbow colors show off all their hues

Then I noticed she started to quiver

I touched her arm and said,
“You’re not cold.
Why do you shiver?”

She looked up with a sad expression
and asked
If I’d ever seen a dream
come alive?

Before I had time to answer, tiny
droplets
Formed in her eyes.

The most beautiful thoughts erupted
In my mind

As I saw my Angel I thought I’d
never find
Light years of love came to
us; together
In that lovely park

And all that happened in the few
minutes
Before it got dark

My dream came true and I knew
Why true love comes to
so few

The sun was goin' down and I noticed
The moon's eerie glow

As she started to cry and look into me
(beyond me) she seemed to know
Just how long eternity's love would last

Suddenly, thousands of colors exploded
Around her head
And I saw my love, my freedom, my life (in her)
And then she was dead!

Midnite was crying. His guitar was crying. The band members and audience were crying. It was such a heartfelt and emotional tribute that the rawness and the authenticity translated itself to anyone that heard it.

Midnite was now a musical force to be reckoned with. This would launch him to a meteoric rise, one, till now, seen by few. One could literally feel the electricity in the air.

That night, Krystal and Midnite had a heart to heart talk. They spoke of the tour, their personal lives and their futures.

"I see Isis being a viable band for another two to five years. I see you as a musical phenomenon. You are truly amazing! I'm not trying to kiss your ass, just speaking the truth," she emphasized. "After this tour, I would appreciate it if you would deem to guest star in our band, you know, once in a while, not as a regular member, of course. Please think about it. I also hope you remember our previous conversation, pertaining to us. Can you tell me what that song was about? I mean, I know it's about Deanna, but what the hell happened?"

"I'll tell you about it one day. It's too soon now. Please respect my wishes and don't ask me anymore," Midnite politely requested. "As far as guest appearances with you, yes, certainly. You had faith in my abilities, you gave me my first vehicle to perform, to bring my dreams to fruition. I would be honored."

Krystal was ecstatic! She leaned over and kissed him on the cheek. Without contemplation, Midnite hugged Krystal. He needed consoling, but couldn't reveal why.

Krystal closed her eyes with relief. She began crying with joy.

That night Midnite thought about Marc. He hadn't yet told him about Deanna. Should he? No, he decided to wait until he had something definitive to tell him, one way or the other. Alone in his hotel room, undisturbed, he called O'Rourke.

Looking at his watch, he said, "Sorry I'm calling so late, it's the first chance I've had. Is there anything new," he inquired?

"Oh, that's ok," a sleepy voice sarcastically answered "Don't worry. It's only two in the morning. Yes, I delivered five tapes. They have two more days to respond, or else we go public. My phone's been ringing off the hook."

"You told them who you are, Mike?"

Mike laughed, "Didn't have to. They knew who I was. The governor's face turned crimson, I'll tell you. Thought he was going to deck me right then and there. He called me into his office and asked me a million questions. Wanted to know how many people knew about this. Wanted to make a deal, pronto."

"How'd you handle that?"

"Well, I was evasive enough not to answer anything with a direct response. It was pretty much the same with the mayor, some of his rich friends and the senator. They're scrambling, believe me."

"What do you feel the outcome will be?"

"Hard to gauge, exactly. We'll get offers to make deals, immunity requests and the like. They'll start ratting each other out. These people don't give a shit about anyone but themselves. Enjoy your tour. Call me on the weekend, I'll have news by then. Should we give Petrus the heads up now?"

"Yeah, it's time. Have you heard from him? Any news from his interrogations? Any news from Aikio?" Then Midnite asked the dreaded question. "Any updates about Deanna?"

"Whoa, slow up, buddy. No, nothing about Deanna. I'll follow up with Petrus when I tell him about the tapes. I've been coordinating with Aikio because of the couriers, but nothing else new."

"Okay, Mike, thanks for everything. I'll call you this weekend. I can't give you a number to call me at because we travel around so much. Wait, you could call Isis's manager's office. He'll relay the information to me. Hold on, I'll get the number."

Midnite went down the hall to the road manager's room, got the number, returned to the phone and gave Mike the information.

A few minutes after hanging up with Mike, he heard knocking on the door. Carlos rushed in, talking excitedly as he entered the room.

"Guess what? Dick Cavett wants you on the show! He must really want you; his people just called me! He heard about ***My Angel*** and the tour. What do you think?"

"Yeah, man. I can dig it. Set it up for when the tour is done. I don't want to have to worry about plastic conversations and fake admiration now. Cavett will give us mass exposure. That will enable us to call our own shots. If all goes well, that is."

Carlos hugged his friend. "This is big, huge! I don't know if it'll help Euphrates, but you'll be on your way, my man."

"Carlos, listen to me. I don't screw my friends. I wouldn't be here if it weren't for you guys. Any decision that's to be made in the future will be a democratic decision. Please relay that to the other members."

After some chit-chat, Carlos left to inform Derrick and Sunny of Midnite's

loyalty to them and to himself, and of course, the news about the Cavett show.

Meanwhile, Midnite sat back on the couch, glad to be alone. He rolled a joint and poured himself some wine. Relaxing for the first time that day, he let his mind wander.

"What a year," he thought. *"I went from meeting my love, getting kidnapped and abused, serving time for something I didn't do, forming a band, meeting Aikio, O'Rourke, Marc and Petrus."*

Chuckling to himself, he found he couldn't actually believe he was now friends with an FBI agent.

Shortly thereafter, his mind moved on to the present. Lone Star, Krystal and Deanna, as well as the not so-long-ago romantic past. Specifically, he still had mixed feelings about the way he had left Kathy.

"Maybe I'm too selfish. I either unintentionally hurt people I love or get them involved in parts of my crazy life, parts that they wouldn't have had to deal with if they hadn't met me. Is my obsession with music and society's ills clouding my ability to interact coherently with good people that just happen to cross my path?"

Midnite was feeling miserable, lonely and guilty. He had hope Deanna would be found, alive. The suspense was eating him up. He needed relief, a friend to talk to. He no longer wanted to be alone. He thought of calling Carlos to his room, but decided against that. On a sudden impulse, he called Krystal's room. She answered the phone, but sounded annoyed.

"Who is this? Do you realize it's fucking twelve thirty?"

"Shit, I'm sorry, it's me, Midnite. I didn't realize you were sleeping. I just wanted to talk. I'll see you tomorrow, good night."

He hung up the phone, chiding himself.

"There I go again," he thought, *"just thinking about myself."*

As it turned out, he didn't have much time to be remorseful. For the second time that night, he heard knocking at his door. Curious as to who it might be, he walked to the door and opened it.

"Excuse the way I look," Krystal said, "but you woke me up, you know."

Krystal looked good, too good. She had on a translucent robe which hid nothing. Midnite involuntarily stared at her.

"I, I only wanted to talk," he stammered. "I was feeling lonely and confused. You should leave now."

Midnite grabbed her arm, fully intending to usher her out the door. She easily extracted herself from his grasp, took his hand in hers and led him to the couch.

"Aren't you going to pour me a glass of wine?" she asked in a throaty voice.

Midnite went into the kitchen, started to reach for a glass, but, instead put his hands on the counter and lowered his head. He felt arms wrapping around his chest. Then he felt Krystal's head on his back.

"Oh, this feels so good, just being here with you, alone. Come on, give me that glass. Talk to me, please."

Midnite and Krystal talked until early morning. He finally let everything out, telling her of his other private and secret life.

When he reached the most recent events, about Deanna, Krystal blurted out, "Oh my God. That's what ***My Angel*** is about! Now I understand. Oh, poor, poor Midnite. Come here."

She led him to the bedroom. She undressed him and got under the covers with him, stroking his head and long hair. Midnite put his head on her breast and fell

asleep. In the early morning she woke him. They made love until noon. At times silently and lovingly, then passionately and with abandon. until Krystal screamed and screamed and screamed.

That weekend Midnite placed the call that he was dreading having to make to O'Rourke.

Mike was upbeat. "We have progress that you can't imagine. Petrus was pissed at first, but he came around quickly. As a matter of fact, he not only has the governor in custody, but the mayor as well. Senators and some lower level legislators, contractors and even a few judges, from all four states, have been apprehended. The jig is up! The warden is singing like a bird. You know, it's funny. They're all more worried about their wives finding out about their, uh, transgressions, than about the illegality of the camps. They're trying to hype it as a criminal work camp, like a work release program. The fact that these people, like yourself, were not criminals, seems to be forgotten."

"So what's the bottom line?" Midnite queried, "Where do things go from here?"

"Things should move quickly from this point forward. Interrogations are ongoing; information is being collated daily. Subpoenas are being issued for witnesses. You'll probably get one at some point, so be prepared," O'Rourke added.

"Yeah, I figured that. Questions; What about Aikio's requests? Have Joey D and his thugs been apprehended? What kind of time will these guys be facing? And, most importantly, anything new about Deanna?"

"The FBI and the State Attorney's office are reviewing all the information. They have interviewed Aikio and are working with him as part of the investigation. Joey and his boys haven't as yet been found."

"Shit, I guarantee they know the answers to Deanna's disappearance." I'll be back home in about two weeks. If they haven't been found, I'll fucking find them myself!"

"What the hell are you thinking, Midnite? You won't do anything without me, will you?"

"Well, I'll at least let you know my plans. This one would be best left to me and Aikio, don't you agree?"

"Hell no, I don't agree. But I do know you'll do whatever you want, anyway.

Seriously though, look me up as soon as you get home. I'll update you, no matter what happens between now and then. You take care of yourself."

The Isis and Euphrates tour became a phenomenon. Due to the increased publicity and Midnite's virtuosity, six more dates were added. Midnite's two-week timeframe for returning home was not to be. The six additional dates would add another ten days to the tour. Carlos was constantly fielding recording requests from the major labels. Midnite, however, had made the decision to hold off on recording, until the tour was over. He felt the band would have honed its sound and then be ready to record. It was a surreal time for all. The opportunities presented to them were what every band dreamed of, but rarely realized.

Privately, Midnite had decided this would be the last tour, at least for the present, that Euphrates would tour with Isis. Ironically, he surmised, if they ever did tour again, Isis would be the opening act for him. During the following weeks, he and Krystal became close friends. They now confided in each other as though they had been lifelong friends. It was a bond formed by the rigors of touring, of the need by both, to be

understood. They admired the other's force of will, their talents and intelligence. Not many people understood Midnite; his intellect was far too advanced for most to comprehend.

Of course, Krystal still had another, personal agenda to fulfill. She was craving Midnite as her soulmate. She had never before met anyone who had such a magnetic effect on her mind, body and soul. He emanated want in every cell of her being. She would not give up until he was hers!

The weeks flew by. Touring was getting tiring. Although Midnite enjoyed the spotlight and notoriety, he was tired and worn out. His music was fast becoming known, especially in Europe, Asia and most of America. His face (and sometimes those of the whole group) was plastered on most music magazines. The major networks clamored for interviews with him Audiences lined up to see Euphrates. Every venue was consistently sold out. Midnite had triumphed! His all-inclusive vision had been given to the masses and accepted. His cosmopolitan messages of love, unity, rebellion and governmental corruption were resoundingly embraced, by the young and old alike.

On the final tour date, in two days, set to take place at the Omni Coliseum in Atlanta, Georgia, Midnite decided to do something unique and unprecedented. First, he had to speak with his triumvirate: Petrus, O'Rourke and Aikio. He called Mike and requested he set up a meeting, to have the three of them in his office, if possible, on the following day.

His long-range plan, to be given to the public incrementally, was going to be the eventual public exposure of his ordeal and the responsible parties that created, allowed, planned and carried out the pre-meditated complex arrangement of corruption, free labor and death. The following day, the day before the Atlanta concert, Midnite received a note from the road manager. It said, 'We are all here."

Midnite walked to the manager's office, requested the manager leave his office and gave instructions that no one was to enter, until he left. Satisfied he was alone, Midnite dialed O'Rourke's office. He answered on the first ring,

"We all have a separate phone, so we can hear you at the same time. What's up?"

"Gentlemen, I have a plan that I will reveal to you. I want your honest feedback,

without reservation. I am aware you will probably disagree with it, but I will, more than likely, implement it anyway. Before I begin, I want to know, Pete, any news about Deanna?" There was silence on the line. "Pete, you there?"

More silence, some whispering, then, "Uh, Midnite, uh, well, uh, yes there is. It's not good. A shrimp boat, trawling along the coast, retrieved her body in their net. The coroner is pretty sure she's been dead for quite a while. I'm, I'm sorry, Midnite."

Midnite gripped the phone and brought it to his chest, squeezing hard.

Placing the phone back to his ear, he asked "Does it look like she suffered? Was she bruised?"

"Her throat was slit, Midnite." The three men heard their friend gasping and quietly sobbing.

"I'll call you back in a few," Midnite sobbed, as he hung up. After a few minutes, he got himself together, enough, he thought, to call again.

"Please don't talk about it," he requested of his friends. "Let's move on. One at a time, I ask of you to tell me what you know, what is new and where things are at."

One by one, they reported the progress of their findings. Petrus explained that they had all the major and most of the minor players, either in custody, out on bail, or waiting to be arraigned. Aikio added that he had been negotiating with the government for ancillary criminal charges to be filed against the Daytona police, the mayor and other governmental officials. In addition, he stipulated, civil suits were being planned for the families that had lost members, either by death or illegal incarceration. O'Rourke quietly said that he'd been trying to locate Joey and any of his cohorts, so far, to no avail.

Midnite went on to outline the basics of his plan. "What I want to know, specifically, is if I do go public, will this in any way impede putting these motherfuckers away?"

Petrus thought for a minute, then said, "At first glance, I think you'd be in the clear. If this had been a week or two ago, I would have told you definitely not. Now everyone has been charged and it's out in the open anyway. Those tapes sure did the trick. They opened up the whole can of worms. Everybody's squealing on everybody!"

"Okay, thank you all. We'll talk soon."

The next night at the Omni Coliseum, the crowd was the largest yet. The major networks and various other news outlets were all in attendance. This was to be the farewell show of the tour. The sets went well, with audience participation at an all-time high. A few of the news channels carried it live.

"This is perfect," Midnite thought.

After Euphrates' last number, but before the encore, Midnite spoke to his band backstage. He gave them a heads-up on what he was about to do.

After he had explained the jist of his plan, he said, "Thank you for having faith in me, for believing in my vision. You all have made it happen for me. Tonight, you will learn things about me you couldn't even imagine. You will understand why I feel the way I do. Tomorrow we will celebrate our success and discuss any future plans we may have."

Euphrates returned to the stage. Midnite stood before the microphone. "I have a few things to say. First, I want to thank Krystal and Isis for giving us the

great, great opportunity to open for them on this tour. Secondly, I was really pissed last night and wrote this little ditty about our country and its people. Don't take offense, it's not about you."

The audience laughed. Midnite picked up an acoustic guitar and strummed along with himself, as he sang,

"Dum De Dum De Dum, get out from under the thumb
Let no one know, you're so fuckin' dumb

Dum De Dum De Dum
Procrastination, Masturbation, Discrimination
So Delicious, Malnutritious, Suckulicious

Buy your fate, get up late, be pretty for your date
'Cause you're the bait

Believe the Prez, you know what he sez, while he smiles and takes your fate
And laughs at what you was

Dum De Dum De Dum you're so
Dum De Dum De Dum

Changing world, out of control
Like a herd of sheep
(Flocking up!)

With a Baa, Baa here and a Baa, Baa there,
Going through life saying
"I say, where the fuck are we dear?"

Is life just too much or you just can't see?
So out of touch with hand slappin' reality

Look at our world, proud of what you see?
Dum De Dum De Dum

After he had finished, Midnite looked up at the audience, handed the acoustic to a roadie and pointed to his Strat. His guitar started wailing, screaming and moaning. His anger and sadness manifested itself into his playing. Suddenly, he switched up and went into a groove, so the band could follow. The audience was mesmerized by what they were witnessing. Abruptly he stopped and sidled up to the microphone.

"The tour is over. Soon I will go on television and tell a story about a chapter of my life, a chapter, which unfortunately, is not yet over. Ironically, however, I probably wouldn't be standing here now, if all that occurred, you know, hadn't happened. It is a story of corruption, brutality, greed and death. A lot of death. It took place not far from here. Some of our leaders, people you all know, were not only involved, but were responsible for conceiving and implementing brutal, modern day slavery, for profit! That's all I'll say now, but watch the news. You won't believe it!"

Midnite returned home on a mission of revenge, then relented and had Carlos book him on the Cavett Show the following week. He needed time to prepare his format, his revenge. He had to figure out a way to talk about the camp, the governor and all the other miscreants. He knew Mr. Cavett would only want to talk about the tour, Krystal and his music. Whereas, at another time, he would have welcomed the opportunity, he now wanted to let the American people be aware of these institutions of slavery that still existed. He also wondered how many people were missing sons, daughters, fathers, sisters and brothers. How many

camps were there? How many states allowed these harbingers of greed? Hopefully, his oration would open up many investigations. Or was he being naïve?

Midnite fell asleep, exhausted. He would have been happy to be home, but the house now seemed empty. He missed the repartee he had enjoyed with Deanna, and certainly he missed the very essence of her being. He woke up sweating and momentarily confused, until the realization came that he'd had another nightmare. He threw the covers off and went to the bathroom. Sick of this aspect of his life and emotionally distraught about Deanna, he decided to put another plan in motion.

Midnite didn't like to have repetitive thoughts swirling in his brain. It was time for action! Looking at the clock on the wall, he saw it was four am. Knowing it was too early to go anywhere, he exercised and confidently went through his fighting maneuvers. Two hours later, though still very early, he placed a call to Aikio. To Midnite's surprise, Aikio answered the phone.

"What are you doing at the dojo so early?"

"Probably here for the same reason you're calling,"

"May I come over? I'd like your help with something."

"Sure, come now."

Midnite arrived at the dojo and without fanfare laid out his plan.

"The first thing I need to know is if your people can locate Joey D. and his gang for me."

"Actually, we already have," Aikio looked directly into his eyes, "He's holed up on the outskirts of town. Word is, he and his crew are responsible for Deanna's death. He hates you with a sociopathic obsession. They say he is quite proud of what he did. No remorse, no normal feelings."

"As I will be!" Midnite punched a wall.

"My dear, dear friend. I understand, I truly do. We will help you, but only to a point. Neither you nor we can be involved with murder. None of us should descend into that black pit, from which you will never be able to extricate yourself. Taking a life is forever."

Midnite collapsed in a heap, emotionally spent.

Looking up at Aikio, he muttered, "You're right, of course. I'm still going to

get him, somehow, someway, he is going to pay, I swear it. I owe it to Deanna and her memory."

"I'll show you where he's hiding out, the rest is up to you…….and your conscience."

Midnite rented an unobtrusive car, not wanting his prey to notice him or identify his personal car. He parked on the west corner, down the block from where Aikio had shown him where Joey's hideout was. Midnite stayed on the stake out for three days and three nights. One of Aikio's men, Hoshiko, occasionally relieved Midnite's watch, so he could grab something to eat and drink, take a shower and perform other necessities.

He had seen no one from his list of Joey's psychopathic associates and was beginning to wonder if Aikio hadn't made a mistake, or maybe Joey had changed hideouts. He chided himself for such thoughts. It wasn't likely Aikio would have made a mistake of this magnitude. Then, in the early morning of the fourth day, he spotted Joey emerging from a car. He was alone. Midnite waited until his nemesis had crossed the street before he quickly left the comfort of his car and silently followed him

into a dilapidated apartment building. The building had four stories, but no elevator. He cautiously followed Joey, but kept a safe distance behind him. Finally, on the third floor, he heard him fumbling for his keys, while cursing and talking angrily aloud, to no one but himself. Just as Joey opened the door, Midnite bounded up the last flight of stairs and hit him hard, with a full body attack, knocking Joey to the ground. Surprisingly, he quickly turned over and rolled away. His reactions were better than Midnite thought they would be, but Midnite's were superior. Midnite side kicked Joey's head as he attempted to rise. The Rat merely grunted and kept coming.

Midnite thought to himself, *"Oh, shit, he's stronger and faster than I had anticipated. Time for a change of strategy"* Midnite dropped back and waited, as Joey stood up.

"That the best you got, pussy. Your bitch fought better than you did. That is, before I slit her fuckin' throat. Joey laughed and said, "You know what the last thing was that she said? Tell Midnite I love him. I'll wait for him in heaven," he mimicked.

"The only problem is you're going to hell!"

"Not before you do!" Midnite shouted back.

He knew he now had to shut his emotions down so he could strategize and fight unemotionally and methodically. He had heard enough. He wanted to end this quickly. Joey reached into his pocket and pulled out a ten-inch knife.

"Ready to die, motherfucker?" Joey bellowed, as he charged the distance between them.

Midnite took a deep breath and readied himself. Joey swiped sideways, missed, then spun around and attempted to stab Midnite's chest. That was the opening Midnite had been waiting for. While Joey's arm was extended from the thrust, Midnite grabbed his wrist and pushed inward on his elbow while side-stepping to a different position. Midnite heard a loud cracking sound and Joey screamed in pain, his elbow broken and useless. Joey spun and tried to hit Midnite with his still working fist, but Midnite had anticipated that move. He threw a side kick to Joey's ribs and followed that with a second kick to the kidneys. As Joey doubled over in pain, Midnite used a ridge hand to his neck, which cut off most, but not all, of his air. In essence, Joey was fully incapacitated. Now, Midnite released his

rage. He barely kept it together, fighting with a barely controlled anger. He repeatedly pummeled Joey's face, then grabbed Joey's knife off the floor and held it to his neck.

"So tell me, should I do the same thing you did to, did to……."

Midnite couldn't bear to say Deanna's name in front of this excuse for a man. He raised the knife into the air and was about to plunge it into Joey's heart, when he heard Aikio's voice, in his head, "Neither you, nor we, can be involved with murder. None of us should descend into that black pit, from which you will never be able to extricate yourself. Taking a life is forever!"

Shaking with torn emotions, Midnite threw the knife across the room while silently thanking Aikio for entering his mind at that exact moment.

Midnite heard a clattering on the stairs. He readied himself for another battle. To his relief, it was Hoshiko and two other men. They looked down at Joey, moaning and blabbering on the floor. Hoshiko calmly walked over and handcuffed the injured man. The other two men lifted him up and started walking down the stairs and outside.

Hoshiko stopped them and asked, “Where do you want him taken?”

“Please ask Aikio to have him dropped off with Petrus. He’s been looking for that piece of shit for a while.”

Hoshiko waved the men out.

“Pick up the honorable one, Aikio, then take everyone to Petrus,” he commanded

“How are you, Mr. Midnite? Are you injured in any way?”

“Only emotionally, my friend. He never laid a hand on me.”

Midnite again bowed in respect, then placed his hand on Hoshiko’s shoulder.

“Thank you and please thank your men for risking themselves. They came here not knowing what dangers they were facing. Thank you again.”

“Aikio has spoken of you with great fondness. He doesn’t speak that way of many.”

Hoshiko returned the bow, turned and ran down the stairs.

Midnite’s next mission would take place on the Dick Cavett Show, unbeknownst to the host, for it was to be the first hand account and unveiling of all that had transpired at the camps, not the

miniscule, superficial coverage in the news media, which had focused primarily on the sex tapes, not the camps themselves. That was all to change.

In the meanwhile, he had to plan his recording career. Midnite would have to sit down with Carlos to analyze offers and make decisions accordingly.

A few days after the Joey incident, Midnite decided to call Krystal, wanting to catch up with her and to have someone he trusted to talk to and, hopefully to see her soon. He thought of how she had helped him get through a hard time when he had told her about Deanna's death and the events that had led up to it.

Krystal was still in Atlanta. She was overjoyed when Midnite invited her to visit him and agreed to come. She had missed their talks and being near him, so she was to book a flight to Daytona Int'l Airport for two days later and five days before Midnite was scheduled to appear on the Dick Cavett show.

Satisfied with their plans, Midnite moved on to his next objective: calling Carlos to plan Euphrates' recording

direction. As he walked over to the phone, it started ringing. It was Peter Petrus.

He was nervous, “The first thing I want to say is how the hell did you find, defeat and bring Joey to justice? We’ve been trying to find that son of a bitch for months!”

“Well, Pete, it’s who you know and what you know.”

“Yeah, with you it’s much more than that! Anyway, I’m calling to update you and to warn you.”

“About?” Midnite cautiously asked.

“First, we have Joey in lock-up, thanks to you. He’s singing and whistling like a bird! It will unquestionably help this case. Now we can collate all the facts, times and events. Scirelli, because of his warped ego, confided in Joey. He also gave him additional tapes, more than you have.

“How’s that? What tapes? From where?”

“Scirelli had one of the guards taping and kept them hidden, even from the warden.”

“You have them?” Midnite asked.

“Yeah, but we had to plea bargain him; it’s part of the deal.”

"No, no, you can't do that. That motherfucker should die. He doesn't deserve to live!"

"Let's get into that later," Petrus' voice boomed. "I'm serious! Now listen to me. Joey said there's a vendetta out on you. Some boys came down from New York and they're gunning for you. Be wise, be extra, extra careful and be very alert."

"Shit, this will never end, will it? Do you have any idea what these guys look like?"

"Yeah, we have them on file. They're known Gambino crime family buttons. Hit men who'll go anywhere, anytime. We have the airports under surveillance, but they might have already arrived."

"Can you get me some pictures of these guys, for Christ's sake, or at least mine?"

"Ok, that's probably a good idea. I'm tied up for a while, but I'll send over LaGrange. Do you remember him? I want to send somebody you know; someone you'll recognize by face."

"Yeah, he was at my interrogation at O'Rourke's office, right?"

"Correction, interview, not interrogation, but yeah that's him. Let me

get ahold of LaGrange. He should be there within two hours, or so."

"Thanks, Pete, I appreciate it. Talk to you soon."

Midnite was relieved in a sense with the heads-up, but at the same time worried because of this new predicament he would be facing, namely Mafia people who were on the governor's payroll. These people weren't playing! Not that they ever were.

Midnite was determined not to be side tracked by the recent news. He called Carlos to discuss their recording options. Carlos deemed their best opportunity lay with Arista, who would give Euphrates considerable artistic license. They had studied his successes on the Isis tour and had taken note of his huge following, which they felt would translate into album sales. However, one of their requirements was that he had to tour again, to promote the album.

"That's not too bad a stipulation. I want to know a few things, however. Do they expect us to play only what we have already performed? I have a boatload of new material, much of which I want on our first album."

"Well, I'll have to continue negotiations on that front. It never came up,

because we didn't know about anything new. It shouldn't be a problem."

"Also, I would want to choose my own recording engineer, not just use Arista's. I've heard albums produced by them and, to be honest, there were quite a few things I didn't like about the sound quality. The instrumentation sounded mushy and the impact of the vocals was lost."

"Anything else I should know?" Carlos pressed.

"That's enough for now. Get back to me on their responses. We'll go from there."

Midnite hung up with his friend and on impulse dialed Marc's number. He had put this call off for as long as he could. Midnite knew Marc wouldn't take the news about Deanna very well. They had become very close during the time Midnite had disappeared. Marc answered on the third ring.

"Hey, my man. Mr. Midnite! I'm really glad to hear from you, it's been awhile. I've been following you through the media. I'm happy for you, man, I really, really am! So, tell me, what's up? Where are you now?"

"Marc, I miss you. I'm tired of all these hangers on, all the phony people

wanting to be near celebrities. I wish you were back home, man. There's lots of good things happening but there's things… Well it's a drag. Forget all that now. I have some important news to tell you. The reason I'm calling is not good."

Marc was concerned. "You okay? What's wrong? More shit from the Rat and his bunch? Fucking tell me already!"

"No Marc, the Rat's in custody. Now steady yourself. I hate to tell you this. De… De… Deanna's dead. I'm sorry, man. I'm so sorry."

There was an excruciating silence as Marc absorbed what Midnite had just told him.

"You're not kidding, huh? A car accident? A fall? She didn't drown, did she? Tell me, man tell me already!"

"No, it was the Rat and his boys. I found him and nearly killed him. I ended up giving him to Petrus. I wanted to kill him. I almost did. Killing him wouldn't have brought Deanna back, tho'."

"Midnite, don't take this personally, but I gotta go."

Midnite heard him sobbing and understood.

"Sure, man. Take your time It's cool. I understand." They hung up.

Trying to pass time, Midnite went over his charts, in order to choose songs for the first album. A short while later he heard a soft knocking on his front door.

"Man, I never have time to myself," he reflected.

Figuring it was LaGrange with his pictures, he put down his charts and started walking towards the door. On his left a moving shadow crossed his vision, from just outside the kitchen window. He quickly walked to the front yard window and peered outside. Standing by the front door was a man he had never seen before. Midnite ran to one of the kitchen windows. He spied another man moving with his back against the wall, inching his way to the side of the rear doorway, gun out. Midnite crouched low, and reached up for the phone. Hurriedly, he called Petrus.

"There are two guys here, one at the front and the other at the back of the house," He told Petrus, who replied, "Don't answer the door, don't go outside. Don't confront these guys in any way. If they're who we think they are, they are very dangerous individuals. LaGrange should have been there by now. He'll be there any minute, just

hang tight. I'll send some back-up, now, too."

Midnite hung up, as he heard the kitchen door handle being tested. Luckily it was locked! He peered out the front again. This man now had his gun out and was trying to force the door open, utilizing his body as leverage. The door was straining from the pressure.

"Would it hold?" Midnite wondered.

Looking at his watch for no real reason, he hoped LaGrange would show up, like now! He went into his bedroom and gathered up his weapons. Positioning himself in the middle of the living room, midway between the front and rear of the two doorways, he waited.

Suddenly, he heard shouting outside. Midnite lunged up and dashed to the window.

LaGrange and another man were running across the lawn, shouting, "FBI, stop right there. Put those fucking pieces on the ground. Slowly. Uh, Uh, I said fucking slowly. Now back the fuck away. We know who you are, Johnny Boy Gotti. You too, Moose LaCosta. We've been expecting you boys!"

Two more black sedans screeched to a halt as agents poured out from the cars, guns drawn. LaGrange signaled all was okay. The newly arrived agent in charge conferred with LaGrange. Immediately the two hoods were handcuffed and whisked away. Midnite came outside.

"Guess I won't be needing these anymore," he said, taking the pictures out of the agents hands. "Now that was good timing for me. What a close shave! It couldn't have been any closer! I do thank you, good sir!" Midnite said as he bowed.

LaGrange studied Midnite's reactions, "You act like you're not fazed by all this. I think you are."

"Fuckin'-A I'm fazed. I don't know how I would have dealt with this freakin' episode. I mean, they had guns. I'm not used to playing that way."

"The FBI man came over and shook Midnite's hand.

"Take care. I'm hoping this is the last of it for you, that this mess will be cleaned up, now. You know, I've primarily been involved with your case from afar, but I've come to admire your beliefs, your resolve and your courage. Petrus does as well. I want you to know that. You know, it's ironic, but people like you and me are

usually at odds with each other. I mean, politically we're at opposite ends of the spectrum. But you don't have underlying objectives or motivations and that is very rare in this world."

Midnite's head was bowed as he listened.

"I appreciate your compliments. Look at it this way. If we take all the bullshit we hear from the government and from ignorant people and throw it away, we're just left with people like me and you. People, deep down, just want to have their friends and family near and to be left alone. You know, go to work, pay their bills, maybe a vacation now and then. All this other shit is just being force fed to us. The key is to recognize it as propaganda, as their objectives not aligning with our own."

"Is life that simple for you? I'm envious."

"Simple in theory. Reality is different. One has to constantly deal with other's aspirations, agendas, greed and misplaced ideals. Anyway, I don't mean to bore you," Midnite noticed the agents far away countenance.

"Actually, not bored but hearing you causes me to have a different perspective, maybe."

Midnite laughed, “We all have to start somewhere.”

After the array of agents departed, Midnite wanted to get back to business. He felt compelled to move on with his plans for recording.

“What else,” he thought, *“do I have going on? I have to make arrangements for Deanna’s funeral, Krystal will be arriving soon, I have to prepare to be on air in a few days and I need to get the band to rehearse.”*

Midnite was worried about logistics. He would have to fly out to Los Angeles for the Cavett show, return to Daytona to rehearse and then proceed to record their album in New York. Of course, Krystal would be arriving before all this was to commence.

The next day, Midnite confirmed his plans. He booked a flight to L.A., made appointments with Paradise Studios and for the funeral, called Derrick and Sunny, and continued his search for a recording studio. Deciding to nix Arista, he finally settled on Electric Lady Studios, on West 8th Street, in New York City’s Greenwich Village. He had an affinity for this studio, conceived of

and built by Jimi Hendrix. If necessary, Euphrates would self-promote, thereby allowing for more artistic freedom and expression, as well as financial independence.

Carlos wasn't exactly overjoyed with Midnite's decision; he thought their arrangement with Arista had been fair, but he had learned to acquiesce, trusting Midnite's decisions and motivation. He also felt that Midnite saw things others didn't, whether short or long term events, obstacles or any number of external criteria. He stated he would set up a relationship with Electric Lady Studios.

That afternoon Carlos picked Krystal up at the airport. Midnite had been detained giving depositions to the FBI. He told Carlos to pick up some food and they would meet at home, later in the evening. Krystal asked a million questions of Carlos. She wanted to know everything he knew about Midnite. She pumped him about his career, his women, his plans for the future. She was interested in Midnite's life before fame came. Carlos patiently explained as much as he could while at the same time keeping Midnite's private life private. He asked her

why, besides the obvious, she was so interested in his life.

Krystal gave her reasons: “I have never known anyone who possesses his intellect, love of life, superior talents, or his ability to communicate with and mesmerize just about anyone he meets. In accord with those reasons, I realized I had never been made love to before. I’ve been screwed by some, yes, but not made love to… and so well. He makes my mind and body feel things they have never known, or that I knew existed. Oh, he’s just so wonderful, on so many, many, many levels.”

Carlos laughed, “I guess that explains a lot. Where do you see things going from here?”

“Well, what I want and how it goes from here will depend entirely on Midnite.”

“How so?”

Krystal expressed tenderness when she replied, “I love him. I want to spend the rest of my life with him. I want to record and tour with him. I want to do everything, have children, buy a house together. God, can you imagine our children, how beautiful and intelligent they would be?”

Carlos looked at Krystal with an aporetic demeanor. “Ok, I get it. But you

have known Midnite for how long? You really feel that way, already?"

"Already? I felt that way the day we picked him up at the airport, before the tour. I mean, my feelings have deepened as I've gotten to know him, you know, on a more personal level, but it was instantaneous, I assure you!"

"You say deeper level. How much do you know about what he went through last year, or more recently with Deanna?"

"I think I know it all," she fervently replied.

Carlos was quiet the rest of the drive home. He helped Krystal into the house and made her comfortable. He poured them each a glass of wine and sat down to talk.

"So, what if Midnite has other plans?"

"I think my biggest obstacle is the recent death of Deanna. I know he had deep feelings for her. Not much time has gone by. I know that also. I will be patient. I'm not entirely selfish, but I know what I want."

Carlos was about to ask more questions when he suddenly stood up.

"Shit! I forgot. Midnite wanted me to pick up some food for us. Wait here, I'll be back. Do you have any preferences?"

"No, Carlos, whatever you guys like, I'll eat. Thanks for asking."

After Carlos left, Krystal explored Midnite's domain. She picked up one of his acoustic guitars and started playing. She liked knowing it was his, it felt comforting and familiar. She impulsively wanted to write a song and record it as a surprise for him. The thought made her happy. She was working out a melody when Midnite arrived home. He listened from outside the door and smiled.

Entering silently, he continued to listen. He was impressed with her composition.

"Wow, who are you in love with?" he jokingly asked her.

She threw down the guitar and ran into his arms.

"Midnite, I'm so glad to see you, to be here with you! How are you?"

"I'm fine, busy but good, I guess. Tell me about yourself."

"Myself? Well, we're planning a new album. It's from our tour. Of course, I, or I should say we, you know, me and Isis want to feature you and Euphrates as well. We'll talk about that, later if it's alright with you."

"Yeah, later, please. Right now I'm up to my neck with projects and plans. My most immediate concern is the Cavett Show, which I'll appear on the end of this week. Maybe you can help me plan that?"

"Of course, my dear, anything you want. Right now, come closer and hug me. Enough talk!"

Midnite complied. He was grateful not to have to talk. He had given his depositions earlier in the day and that had drained him emotionally. He and Krystal held each other, enjoying their intimacy.

Krystal hesitantly pulled away and grabbed his hand. She looked at Midnite sideways and smiled. Without preamble they started towards the bedroom, but they had completely forgotten about Carlos.

"Hey guys," he cheerfully exclaimed, "I have returned! Everyone good with Chinese?"

Midnite and Krystal looked at each other and laughed. "Yes, let's eat, I'm starving," Midnite said.

The three friends ate, talked and enjoyed each other's company. After they finished their meal the conversation became serious. Carlos updated Midnite about Electric Lady studios, Krystal shared her thoughts with Carlos about their upcoming

album and Midnite asked for advice about his plans for the Cavett Show. A short while later, after more than a few glasses of wine, Carlos declared it was time for him to leave.

Once again, finally, Krystal and Midnite were alone. As they cleared up after dinner, Krystal told Midnite she liked Carlos and she thought he was a loyal, honest and true friend to him. She told him why she thought so referring to their earlier conversations. Midnite was, at first, somewhat taken aback.

"I knew you liked me," he affirmed, "but I didn't realize your emotions ran so deeply."

"Does that concern you? I mean, now, because, well because of Deanna?" she hesitantly asked.

Midnite stopped cleaning and sat down.

"I'll have to ponder that for awhile. I'm still recovering from losing my lover, my friend. Can you understand that?"

"Of course, my dear. I'm sorry for bringing this up now. Please forgive me."

Midnite reached up and grabbed her hand.

"No need to forgive," he compassionately explained, "I am grateful you're here now. I need you, I need comfort

and a friend." They left further cleanup for later and silently walked to the bedroom, still holding hands.

Chapter XV
(Exculpation!)

Deanna's funeral was on a beautiful, sunny day. It was a simple yet heartfelt affair. Midnite officiated by speaking of his love for her and her many attributes. He held her remains in his hands while he spoke. Although not many people were in attendance, those that were had known, admired and cared for Deanna. Two of her fellow (Hojo) employees, Marc, Petrus, Aikio, Sunny, Derrick, O'Rourke and Carlos each verbalized their memories and times with her. Marc's remembrances were deeply emotional and a very special tribute to his extraordinary friend. The band members told Midnite they wanted to dedicate Euphrates' first album to her.

Later that day Midnite spread her ashes in the ocean that she had loved so much. The memory of her warmth and goodness would always be with him.

Marc and Midnite sat in their favorite café, reminiscing, drinking and toasting Deanna.

"Thank you for being here with me, for Deanna and for our friendship,"

"I couldn't have missed this for the world. I still can't believe she's gone," Marc was silently weeping, "She was such a special person."

They clinked glasses in a silent toast. There was an awkward silence until Marc asked, "Can I be honest with you?"

"Of course, what's up?"

"I know it's none of my business, but what's the deal with Krystal?"

Midnite sat up straight.

"I mean, Deanna just died and you're with someone else? Yes, Krystal's super-hot, famous and an amazing woman, granted, but so soon?"

"I don't quite understand it myself. I think I need some comfort and understanding. I need love, you know? I may appear super independent, but I have needs also. I try to be pragmatic. It may be cold hearted and selfish, I'm not sure. I have to move on. Deanna's not here; there's nothing I can do about it. It doesn't erase my memories nor the love we had together. Krystal says she loves me, maybe I'll feel love again. I'm young. What the fuck do I know? Time reveals all."

"Yeah, I get it. I'm just so bummed. You know, when you were on tour, Deanna would call me and she would just go on and

on about you. She loved you so much. I loved her too, you know. Oh, not like you two, more like a big brother."

"Let's move on, please," Midnite spoke softly. Life goes on, time passes, we grow older and perhaps wiser, hopefully wiser."

Midnite was not happy with this conversation. He understood Marc's trepidation, but he wasn't into dwelling on negativity anymore. He needed sunshine, not black clouds of despair.

"Marc looked at Midnite with an inquisitive air of disapproval. "Alright, man, I get it, let's move on."

The conversation ended, but a conspicuous silence prevailed.

The following day Midnite left for Los Angeles. He was to meet with the Cavett crew, before going "live," to be briefed on the questions and answers that they had scripted out for him. He had other plans!

Once in the air, he felt somewhat emancipated. He enjoyed his alone time, free from distractions and annoyances. He landed in the late afternoon and was picked up by the studio limousine. The studio informed him that he was to be on the very

last “Dick Cavett Show” episode, supposedly an honor and cause of jealousy amongst many performers. Midnite was not impressed. He listened to the show’s prep people, pretending he was on board with their scripts and pat answers. When they were done, he asked to meet Mr. Cavett. At first, he met resistance with his request. He held firm, threatening to not go on. The crew scurried back and forth, not sure what to do. A few minutes later Dick walked into his room.

“Happy to meet you, I look forward to your interview.”

They shook hands before Dick glanced at his watch, “Okay, I’m here. What is so important?”

Midnite said, “Something important, Mr. Cavett. I went through the litany of answers I’m supposed to give tonight. I’ll do that, but I want, no need, you to allow me to tell a story, my story about some really, really bad things, bad people and how it all led me to be here tonight. Will you do that for me, for your American audience?”

Cavett looked hard at Midnite then at his watch again, “Come on to my office, now.”

Midnite gave him a brief synopsis of what he was about to tell the world. Cavett

asked him if all he was about to say was verifiable. Midnite assured him it was.

After Cavett and Midnite had bantered back and forth about Euphrates' history, his youth, his fame as a guitar prodigy and other aspects of his life, the two spoke of Midnite's relationship with Krystal and what plans were envisioned for the future. Midnite was about to answer Cavett's last question of the night, but instead stood up, looked over for Cavett's approval and waited for his nod.

Dick shrugged and said to the audience, "Midnite is about to tell a story that will blow your minds and leave you with doubts about our great country. We will not go to commercial until Midnite is finished."

Midnite walked to the front of the stage. He looked down, took a deep breath and started.

"What you are about to hear from me will be hard to comprehend. I ask all of you to listen carefully. You will not believe these atrocities are possible, here in this day and age. When I am finished, please discuss what you have heard. In a day or two, when you have had time to fully digest everything,

call or write to your state representatives. Please beseech them to fully investigate these atrocities and to make sure all the guilty parties are indicted and put away for a long, long time. As we speak, there are mayors, governors, judges, and state legislators in custody who will be tried, for many crimes, but primarily crimes against humanity, against us. However, we need as much public outcry as possible, for these are very powerful and wealthy people who have a lot of influence. There are many other facilities like the one I will now describe to you……...as well as many crimes that have been committed, crimes that until recently have largely gone unpunished."

Midnite spent the next hour summarizing his and the other kidnapped citizens' horrors. He spoke of the death of his friends, the forced prostitution, the brutality and the forced labor. He highlighted the fact that members of these crime families were still operating. Finally, he detailed the death of his lover, Deanna.

When he finished speaking, there was a deafening silence. Many in the audience were crying. Midnite walked off the stage feeling free for the first time in many months.

He woke up to constant phone calls. He wearily took a shower, shaved, made coffee, then sat down next to the phone. It didn't take long for it to ring again. He resigned himself to what was to come and snatched the phone off the hook.

"Hello, yes, who is it?"

"Hey, Midnite, it's Petrus. Boy, you sure opened a huge can of worms. Have you seen the papers this morning? You're fuckin' plastered all over the front page."

"Actually, I got in late last night and went right to bed. So, no, I haven't seen anything. What are they saying?"

"Judicious disbelief, but many of the investigative reporters are gearing up to do their job. My bosses are quite upset, saying stuff like it will hurt the prosecution's case. You know, they'll want to change the trial locations, there won't be impartial jurors, things like that."

"What's your take?" Midnite asked with feigned indifference.

"Shoot, I think the hub bub will blow over in a week or two. I think the reporters, as well as my people will uncover more camps, or facilities like 'em. I look at it as if we'll have more foot soldiers on the ground,

more people uncovering things we probably wouldn't have, or at least it would have taken us much longer to come across. So, all in all it's a good thing."

"Ok, thanks, Pete. Can I catch up with you later? My phones been ringing all morning."

Almost immediately, the phone rang again. "Midnite, you're fucking brave and a fucking genius," O'Rourke vociferated. "I am proud of you. Let's get together soon and celebrate."

"Thank you, Mike. I'll catch up with you."

The phone rang incessantly. Call after call came in. The day tediously wore on. He had finished speaking with his many friends and acquaintances when the tone changed dramatically. Initially, local reporters appeared out of nowhere, at his doorway, asking for interviews and throwing out a myriad of questions. Consequently, reporters from major news organizations called and pressed Midnite for details. He was patient but terse with them, upset because it had taken them so long to have an interest in the plights he and many others had had to undergo. Although aware that the FBI had put a lid on the investigation, he felt that a true reporter would have been more

interested in researching the little information that had been known and professionally pursuing it. He had done his part. The details would come out in court. Midnite was torn between avoiding the paparazzi and having them wait for the upcoming trials or giving them additional information now to jumpstart their investigations. He concluded that he would befriend one or two reporters and advise them of the best ways to gather more evidence. He would review his notes and contact them in the not too distant future.

Krystal had waited patiently for him to return from Los Angeles and finish with his talks with the reporters. She now figured she deserved his time. She wanted Midnite to concentrate on her, only her. The phone rang again. Midnite stared at it deciding whether to pick it up or not. Krystal shook her head no.

"Please don't answer it," she pleaded.

"Sorry, babe. Any call could be important." He was actually pleased when he heard Aikio's comforting voice, while noting Krystal's frown.

"Hello, my favorite student. I am calling to see how you've weathered your most recent storm. Are you weary?"

"Hello, my sensei. I am weary, however I am mostly happy and I am ready to record my first album. That is what I will focus my mind on."

"You have a keen intuition and a sharp as a scalpel mind, and you are in tune with the universe. I will no longer worry about you," Aikio laughed, "I am calling to inform you that I have to go on an extended visit to settle some family matters. My associates will keep an eye on you and I will have them inform you of any, shall I say, information pertinent to your wellbeing."

"In return I would like to say that if there's anything I can do to help you, I'll only be a phone call away," Midnite replied.

"You are my son and I am honored to know you. I will stay in touch."

Midnite smiled and felt warmth through his body as he heard the click of the phone.

Returning his attention to Krystal, he shrugged and said, "See, that wasn't so bad, was it?"

"No, I just want all of you all the time," Krystal grinned before she kissed his lips. "I can't help it. That's the way I feel."

Midnite left for New York the following day in order to finalize negotiations with Electric Lady Studios. There would soon be another of his dreams coming to fruition. Carlos was to meet him first, later that evening, so they could formulate their plan. Derrick and Sonny would arrive in two days.

Midnite arrived at JFK airport to great fanfare, both for his musical aspirations as well as his public disclosure of the atrocities committed by members of the government. Fans lined the airport, waiting for their hero, and reporters waited impatiently behind the fans while trying to work their way forward. As Midnite departed the plane, he saw in amazement the public awaiting his presence.

"Life always has been or is a dichotomy, a dualism that appears on its own," Midnite thought as he contemplated this aspect of his life, trying to clarify how he would function in order to carry out his musical ambitions and juggle his new found fame. He felt a duty to stimulate specific reporters' interest. There were questions and

answers he wanted to be asked and that he could answer, in order to facilitate public interest, thus bearing pressure on law enforcement and the judicial system to pursue all avenues as expeditiously as possible.

On impulse Midnite called out two reporters' names. Neither were in attendance. Midnite put his hand in the air then to his lips, requesting silence.

"Please inform these reporters that I will grant them exclusive, well semi-exclusive I guess, there are two of them."

There was a ripple of laughter throughout the crowd.

"Um, interviews that is. Thank you and now on to my fans."

In order to recharge his internal batteries Midnite planned to visit his family before schlepping into the city. He needed to rest and be with the people he loved and trusted above all others. He had a wonderful reunion with them gathering strength, by absorbing and giving love to each other. Of course as usual he had to leave. All Euphrates personnel had arrived and were waiting in the city ready to start production. Midnite knew he was now behind schedule. He still had to meet with Carlos and the other band members before he and Carlos

would be able to finalize negotiations with Electric Lady Studios.

As usual he had a bittersweet farewell. His family didn't want him to leave and he didn't want to either. But of course duty called. Midnite, for old times' sake, took the LIRR (Long Island Railroad) into the city, then walked nineteen blocks to 53rd St in order to grab the subway to the Village. Carlos was waiting for him in front of the studios.

"Hey, man, you ready to do this? You look kind of tense is everything ok?"

Midnite slapped Carlos lightly on the back.

"Yeah, man. All is cool. I was getting worried you'd be late and I'd have to do this alone is all."

"That's not like you," Midnite was surprised by his answer, "You do stuff like this by yourself all the time."

"Not for our first album, man. This is huge, you know."

"Come on. Let's do this," Midnite felt excited yet looked calm. The time spent with his family had taken the edge off of his anxieties. He felt confident and had a clear vision of his objectives. He was ready!

The negotiations went well. Euphrates would have total control to produce, manage, market and dictate the terms for the band's promotions. In essence they were beholden to no one. The down side was that no company would be promoting them. Midnite was willing to take a chance that the music alone would be their promotion-that and Carlos' contacts! Midnite had written eleven songs he felt would be a good showcase for the band's diverse talents. Derrick also wanted to contribute a song he felt would fit well with the theme of the album. Derrick and Sunny asked Midnite many questions about what he had revealed on television. They had both been appalled, awed and dumb-struck by what they had been learning over the days since Midnite's appearance on the Cavett Show. Derrick confessed that his song was a tribute to Midnite and insisted it be included in the album.

The following seven weeks were a learning experience for all of them. Midnite was a perfectionist and had to do take after take until he was personally satisfied with the results. This was also true about his engineering skills. He had spent the first week with the premier studio engineer,

watching and studying exactly how that man controlled the mixing board. During the second week he sat with the engineer and worked in tandem with him. By the third week he had informed the studio that the engineer was no longer needed except to maintain control of the standards given by Midnite while he was physically playing his compositions.

Finally, they were finished with the album. It had taken many long days and hard sleepless nights in the studio. Euphrates was a family, at least for now. Midnite knew nothing was permanent and he wanted to take full advantage of the band's unique comradery. This closeness manifested itself in their music and therefore their album. On the night they completed the album, the band celebrated at a private club. They wanted to be alone in order to plan an upcoming tour, which would promote their album, as well as strategizing the best way to market it on the radio. The next day Derrick and Sunny left to spend time with family and friends. Carlos and Midnite remained in New York to solicit radio executives and other influential music promotors.

The two reporters, Harold Gordon, from the New York Times and Leo Goldberg, from the Village Voice, both of whom Midnite had requested, contacted him upon his arrival at the airport, were together when they appeared at his hotel room. Midnite had wanted them specifically because he admired their reporting style and tenacity. Additionally, they both based their reports on proven facts, not hearsay. Actually, he was also partial to them because they had written superb reviews of his virtuosity. Midnite was somewhat taken aback by the fact that they came to his hotel room with no prior notifications. Up till now Midnite hadn't been sure either one had even received notice of his request.

After introductions were made, Harold spoke first.

"I must tell you when I received your summons I was surprised and honored. I have seen you play. You are as amazing as people say you are."

"That's one reason I wanted you. You report straight forward and objectively," Midnite laughed, "Seriously though, I would like to sort of enlist you so I can periodically give you additional information relevant to the proceedings unfolding in court."

Leo chimed in, “So what exactly does that mean? Can you elaborate for me, uh, for us?”

“I have firsthand knowledge of all the shit that went down at the camps. I have information that even the FBI doesn’t know about. As each important person is brought to trial, I will leak intelligence to you which should help the prosecutor’s case. Be forewarned! These are influential and powerful people who will stop at nothing to avoid incarceration. Do either of you gentlemen have any further questions?”

Midnite carefully studied their reactions to his elaboration of what was to come. Neither appeared intimidated by the notion that they might soon be facing danger.

“I’ve waited a long time to be part of an investigation like this. I love it!” Harold exclaimed.

“Same goes for me,” Leo slapped his knee, “Thank you Midnite, thank you!”

“Since I’m pretty hard to get a hold of, kindly give me your phone numbers, both at home and at your offices, so I’ll be able to reach you at any time. If you do need to reach me in a hurry, please call Mike O’Rourke in Daytona Beach. He’ll figure out a way to reach me. In the meantime,

come back tomorrow, say at eleven in the morning and I'll give you some facts that will speed up your investigations."

Midnite shook hands all around and politely ushered them out.

Soon after the reporters left Midnite began reflecting on his relationship with several of his women. He enjoyed Krystal's company. She was bright, articulate, beautiful and fun to be with. He was torn between his need for personal alone time and his need for company. He knew Krystal was needy in the sense that she easily got jealous about anything or anyone that took him away from her. This aspect of her personality caused him concern and at this juncture of his life he needed to be able to be spontaneous and beholden to no one.

"Time will tell where that path will take me," he surmised.

Being in New York, he also thought about Kathy and how he had left her. Feeling guilty, he decided to try to reach out to her, if for no other reason but emotional closure. Midnite continued his reverie and scrutinized his feelings pertaining to Lone Star. Still feeling remorse for the way in which he had handled that situation, he couldn't shake his discomfort about the

quandary he had created for her. He didn't like to exploit anyone. He felt he had used her to obtain the tapes in order to realize his own needs. Deciding he should rectify that situation upon returning to Daytona at least gave him temporary peace of mind.

Satisfied with the circumspect evaluation of his love life Midnite's thoughts segued to his music, reporters and upcoming trials. He desperately wanted to end the chapter of his life pertaining to his abduction and its aftermath in order to move on and focus solely on his music.

Deciding to clear his head, he walked uptown to Bryant Park, at 5th Avenue and 42nd Street. Upon arriving at his destination he was surprised to see that there was a political rally in progress.

Angela Davis, the Black activist and scholar, was speaking. The park was full of interested spectators. Intrigued, Midnite worked his way through the crowd until he was directly in front of the stage. Angela paused her speech when she spotted him, then smiled and waved. She motioned for him to climb onto the stage next to her. One of her bodyguards, an astonishingly beautiful and sinuous woman, reached down and grabbed Midnite's hand, easily hauling

him onstage. Angela leaned over and gave him a kiss. Turning back to the microphone she confidently addressed the crowd. “This my friends, is Midnite,” she put her arm around his shoulders, “He is not only a gifted musician, composer and producer of great music, but is also a fellow comrade in the struggle for freedom. He has proven this, both publicly and privately. Midnite, would you care to say a few words for us?”

“I would. First though, I’d like to return the praise you heaped on me and respond in kind. Ms. Davis here,” Midnite turned and kissed her, “has inspired me and millions of others. In her struggle for freedom of her people. She has been jailed, framed and fired from her job as a university professor. Yet she continues, bravely and unselfishly, educating the world about the conflicts she and her people endure on a daily basis. She is one of my heroes!”

The crowd cheered and became animated.

“Play for us, Midnite, play! We love you.”

Midnite laughed and thanked the crowd.

“Sorry, but we’re not set up for that. Today’s not about me.” Angela grabbed his

hand and thanked him. As Midnite was leaving, the bodyguard that had hauled him onstage passed him a note. He stuffed it in his pocket and jumped down. The crowd was friendly but started getting a little too rambunctious. The comely bodyguard jumped offstage and grabbed Midnite's hand. She pushed through the crowd until they emerged unscathed out of the park.

"Whew," Midnite grinned, "that was a close call. Thank you."

"My name's Deborah. Now please read my note."

"Huh, oh, right. Hold on a second."

Midnite took the note out of his pocket, unfolded it and read aloud, "Please meet me at The Palladium. It's a new club on East 14th St. Eight pm tonight. Kisses Deborah."

Midnite looked at her. "Wow." He couldn't think of anything else to say.

"I like you. I like your music. I want you," she boldly said. "I saw you play in L.A. a few months ago. I can't believe I'm standing here with you. You're an amazing human being. I watched the Cavett Show. I have so many questions to ask you. Will you meet me tonight, Please?" she coyly asked.

Midnite chuckled, "I came here to clear my head and figure out ways to

simplify my life. Something tells me that won't happen if I agree to meet you."

Deborah clapped her hands and jumped up and down, "I'll take that for a yes. See ya' then. I gotta get back to Angela, bye-bye!"

She melted back into the crowd and disappeared from Midnite's view.

Midnite left the park and took the subway downtown. He wanted to explore Greenwich Village to revisit the favorite haunts of his earlier days. Much of his youth had been spent in New York City primarily because he had known that many of his favorite musicians frequented the clubs there. Midnite used to follow their careers and attended their performances whenever possible, thus becoming known to many of them.

Hours passed. The sun was low in the sky and Midnite was getting hungry. He started searching for a restaurant that served Thai food, his favorite cuisine. As he was crossing Mercer St. and 4th Ave. Midnite had an unsettling feeling. He wasn't quite sure why this feeling had materialized but he had long ago learned these visceral emotions were never to be ignored. In preparation for

what he was sure was to occur, he stretched and flexed his muscles.

"What the hell," he thought, *"why here? Who could be after me? What would they want?"*

He picked up the pace and kept vigilant, deciding to forego dinner. Glancing apprehensively around and then at his watch, he noticed it was almost eight o'clock. He had not been planning on meeting Deborah, but the gods deemed otherwise.

"Maybe subconsciously I came here," he thought. *"What path will open or close for me? I guess I'll be finding out soon enough,"* he mused.

He surmised that being with another person would keep him safer. A witness could deter an attack or some other malfeasance. Midnite walked the ten blocks to 14th St. and stopped in front of the Palladium. He studied the billboards but stayed alert and occasionally looked around waiting for whatever was about to happen. His senses were acute and he was nervous. Deborah had not yet shown up. Midnite checked his watch. It was eight-thirty. *"That's it, I'm out of here,"* he said to himself.

As he turned to walk to the nearest subway station, Deborah came around the corner and ran up to him.

"I'm sorry," she panted, "the police detained me, said I robbed a nearby store. You know, the usual shit they always throw at us. Anyway, I'm here now. Do you forgive me?"

Relieved, Midnite replied, "Sure, let's go inside. I have something I want to discuss with you once we're settled inside, ok?"

"Oh, it's too soon to get married don't you think?" she joked.

"Ha, ha. No, this is serious."

She looked at him quizzically, not sure where this was leading. They sat down and ordered drinks.

"Are we settled yet?" she asked, after the drinks had arrived.

"This may sound bizarre to you, but I have the distinct feeling that I'm being watched and followed. I can't explain why, I just know it, I feel it."

Deborah intently studied him. "If I didn't know what has happened to you, and I do want to know more, I might think you're just a paranoid fool. However, from what I know about you, you're definitely not an alarmist. So, yes, I take what you're

saying seriously. Are you uncomfortable being here, you know, sitting in the Palladium with all these people?"

"Very uncomfortable. Can we go somewhere quiet and out of the way, somewhere I'll be able to spot people who have an 'outsider' look, a look that they don't belong in the Village? Usually, I'll get the image of a weasel or some other sneaky predator."

Midnite shrugged, then said, "It's just an innate sense of wrong that doesn't fit in. I dunno, it's hard to explain."

"I think I understand. C'mon, I know a great little place not far from here." Midnite threw down some cash and they left the Palladium.

The "great little place" turned out to be Deborah's apartment. She told Midnite to get comfortable and relax.

"We're safe now," she smiled. "I'll get you some wine and some really good cheese and crackers. That good?" she asked.

"Yeah, that's good. Thanks. I'm kinda hungry. Do you need any help in there?"

"No, just relax. I'll only be a minute. So tell me, who do you think is after you?

Your problems all took place down South, no?"

"I don't know for sure who's after me but now that it's gone national, it could be anyone, anywhere, that's somehow connected."

Deborah placed the wine, cheese and crackers on a table in front of Midnite. She sat down next to him on the couch, facing him and sitting cross-legged.

"Eat," she said, "you look hungry."

Midnite complied. "So what am I doing here? What is it you want from me?"

Deborah sighed and looked pained.

"Remember I told you the cops detained me? Well it wasn't about a robbery. That was bogus. They wanted me to inform on you, to be your "girlfriend", to keep tabs on you and tell them of your whereabouts."

"Why would they do that? We don't even know each other. Sorry, that doesn't make sense to me."

"Well, that's my fault. I told them we've known each other for years. I was trying to brag about knowing you. That sure as shit backfired."

"Why would they choose you?"

"Ugh. Two reasons: One, because I'm one of Angela's bodyguards, and two,

because I've been busted for pot and I'm out on bail. They think I'm vulnerable. The cops said they'd throw out my case, you know, make it go away if I helped them. I'm a bodyguard because I believe in the struggle, but I don't want to go to jail. I'm scared."

"You're actually planning on giving them information about me?"

"Sweetie, listen to me. Would I tell you all this if that were the case? Fuck them! I brought you here to validate your suspicions and intuition. Of course I wouldn't tell those warped cops any information about you. You've done nothing wrong. You've been nothing but truthful. Believe me, I know these are dangerous people who are powerful and far-reaching. I want to help and protect you from them."

"I appreciate your words. However, this is my battle, not yours. I think I should be leaving now." Midnite rose to leave but Deborah pulled him back down.

"You need a plan. You can't go walking around New York. What's on your agenda today?"

"Nothing special," he replied. Tomorrow I'm to meet with Capitol Records to talk about distribution for our album. I'll be busy with meetings this week and then I'll return back to Daytona."

"Hmm, I'm thinking," Deborah said aloud, "Why don't you stay here tonight? I'll get in touch with some of Angela's people and they should be able to clear the way for your protection tomorrow. I don't think the cops who are in cahoots with Daytona would take a chance and nab you with bodyguards around. How's that sound?"

"Yes, that sounds good, at least for a temporary solution. Thank you for that. May I use your phone?" Midnite asked. She nodded in the affirmative. Midnite found Harold Gordon's office number and dialed. When Harold answered, Midnite gave him a summary of the day's events."

"So you're telling me the police have been keeping tabs on you? According to your friend they want an excuse to nab you. It can only be because Governor Richardson, you know, the governor of Georgia, is due to begin trial next week. They obviously want you to disappear now for forever. Let me check with my sources in NYPD and I'll call you back in an hour."

Midnite gave him Deborah's home number, insisting Harold keep the number confidential.

Time dragged by. An hour passed. Midnite was tense as he waited impatiently for Harold's return call. Deborah tried her best to allay his anxiety but Midnite was in no mood for small talk. Finally, the phone rang. Midnite sprang up and answered the phone.

"Midnite, it's me, Harold. Don't speak; just listen. Get out of there as soon as possible. The police are assembling a task force as we speak. My source says you, Debbie, and possibly Angela are going to be framed for murder. Don't ask questions. Just get the hell out of there now! Keep in touch with me, no matter where you end up. I'll do what I can on my side, but you'll be on your own. I'll write my column telling your story. Maybe if there's some press they won't be too stupid. Good luck, buddy. I wish you luck!"

Midnite now knew he would need help. "Deborah, I don't know you well but I'll have to trust you now. How can I get upstate? How can we get upstate? I know where we can hide until we're able to get a handle on this situation. Also, get in touch with Angela and tell her the three of us may be set-up for a murder charge, especially if we get nabbed now. Have her contact her

attorneys and the media. Then tell her to get into some sort of protective custody.

Deborah concurred and called her associates to inform them of recent developments. She accurately described what the reporter had told Midnite, and that she and Midnite urgently needed help, adding that Angela was in danger as well.

She put down the phone and said, "They'll be on the way to pick us up. I don't know where they'll bring us but it'll be safe. Do you have to get anything or go anywhere before we flee the City?"

"No, I'm cool. Let's get going. How long will we have to wait? I have to make more calls. We should prepare to be away for a while. I, I think……,"

Midnite froze as they heard a rapping on the door.

"Deborah, it's us. Open up," came a voice from the hall. She recognized the voice and walked towards the door, but stopped and looked at Midnite. He held up his hand, picked up the phone and dialed.

"Pete Petrus please. This is Midnite, I need him now. Right now."

He heard voices shouting in the background.

"Hello, Midnite, what's up?"

"Pete, you have to do me a big favor. I just got word that the NYPD is going to frame me, Angela Davis, and another friend, her bodyguard, on murder charges."

"You're involved with Davis? Oh, shit! Where are you? Give me a number and……"

"No good, Pete. I'm leaving where I am as soon as I get off the phone with you. I'll call you when I'm able. Please call O'Rourke and Marc. Tell both of them to be careful. Oh, call Harold Gordon of *The New York Times* too. He'll fill you in. I gotta go."

He nodded to Deborah and she opened the door. Three big muscular men entered the apartment. The largest man hugged Deborah. "C'mon," he implored, "we gotta go now!"

The five of them ran down the steps and into a nondescript van. Midnite thanked them for their rescue.

"Where are we headed?" he asked the large man.

"Best you don't know, my man. Let's get ya'll safe. Then you can worry about where we're going. Deb said you know of a place upstate? Once we know the coast is clear or things have quieted down, we'll talk about upstate."

Midnite nodded and offered his hand. “Thank you. My name’s……”

“We know who you are,” the man laughed, “or else we wouldn’t be here. My name’s Richie. It’s a pleasure.”

The two men shook hands. The van pulled off and headed towards the Midtown Tunnel to Long Island. Deborah and Richie were quietly discussing plans for the immediate future when Richie yelled out, “Oh, no. Look!” pointing at the road ahead.

They were now halfway through the tunnel with cars behind and in front of them. Up ahead were six police cruisers with lights flashing. The police blocked the roadway, so cops could walk through the tunnel checking I.D. They were allowing one car through their blockade at a time. There was no way out for the van.

Midnite’s mind was racing as he considered his options.

“They want me, not you guys. They’re just using Deb as their excuse to get me. Thanks for everything.” He opened the door and jumped out.

“Wait, no, don’t do it. Come back!” they shouted, “Midnite come back!”

Midnite calmly walked towards the police barricade. As he got closer he raised his arms, showing he had no weapons. Two

cops approached with their weapons drawn shouting for him to lay on the ground face down. He complied. Cautiously they handcuffed him then stood him up, pushing him aggressively into the back seat of a black unmarked cruiser. Two cops were in the front. The officer sitting in the passenger seat turned around, so Midnite could see his face. Midnite's heart missed a beat as he recognized Tweedle Dum……...

To be continued…….